

ST. PAUL'S, GRANGE,
SUNDAY SCHOOL.



PRESENTED to

Bessie Bethel.

*for regular attendance
& good conduct in
1923.*

*G. Victor Gasbell
Treas.*



I am quite better &
 hope soon to be let^{out} for
 a holiday. Your old friend

Dec. 31st L. M. Alcott.
 (1887)

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

DREAMER AND WORKER

A STORY OF ACHIEVEMENT

BY

BELLE MOSES



LONDON

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TO
MY MOTHER
WHO HAS BEEN TO HER CHILDREN
WHAT "MARMEE" WAS TO HER
"LITTLE WOMEN"

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

THE following verses in memory of this gifted writer were written at the time of her death in 1888 :—

*Above New England's cold, grey hills,
And all the sunny Southern plains,
Wherever childhood's pure heart thrills
With childhood's sacred joys and
pains ;*

*In all the haunts of " Little Men,"
And in each " Little Woman's " breast,
In every hamlet, field and glen,
Wherever little feet have pressed—*

*There dwells a sorrow in the air ;
And list, a name that through long
years
Was echoed gladly ev'rywhere,
Is whispered with a gush of tears !*

*And on the bookshelves, see a row
Of treasured volumes, kissed with sobs
By many a heavy-hearted " Jo,"
And half a million weeping " Bobs."*

*Ah, well your childish tears may rush
In crystal sorrow-streams away,
Ah, well your laughing eyes may gush
With sudden drops of grief to-day !*

*No more that loving voice shall tell
Your rapturously listening ears
The stories you have loved so well !
No more for ever through the years*

*That noble heart, whose wealth was given
To you, the chosen ones of God,
Shall lead your trusting souls to Heaven
Along a flower-sprinkled sod !*

*No more shall " Rose's " gentle love
Fill sympathetic eyes with light,
Nor " Phæbe's " low songs rise above
The trembling silence of the night.*

*No more shall " Bab " and " Betty " roam
Along their lilac-sheltered walk,
No more shall " Jack " and " Jill " come home,
No more shall " Dan " and " Demi " talk*

*And love, like boys do, every day ;
Ah, no ; their voices all are still—
The sweet, dim shadows fade away,
And silence fills the lone " Aunt
Hill."*

*Farewell, O nobly speaking tongue,
Farewell, O sacred, sceptred pen ;
A long life's noble song is sung,
And all a world has said " Amen,"*

*The children's Laureate, mourned by
these
With all of childhood's tender woe—
May we not leave one simple piece
Of laurel for thee ere we go ?*

*Weep older children's tribute tears
Above the face so lately gone ?
But even as we speak, she hears
A higher Voice that says, " Well
done."*

INTRODUCTION

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT occupies a niche peculiarly her own in the hearts of all girls. No writer of fiction, before her time or since, has been able to touch the responsive chord that Miss Alcott struck in "Little Women" and the many succeeding girls' stories. Her charm lay, not in plot nor excitement, but in the natural, healthy, everyday life she spread out before her readers. Incidents drawn freely from her own and her sisters' lives formed the framework of "Little Women," and through her stories, long or short, runs this vein of reality.

From her obscurity as a struggling author she sprang to the first place, and her name has since become a household word. And so I should like to introduce Miss Alcott to her girl friends as a girl like themselves, who worked, who struggled, and who conquered by sheer force of energy and perseverance, not by the great things she did, but by the little things that counted most. Many years ago "Little Women" made its bow to the world, and many years hence it will still be found on our girls' bookshelves, as fresh and vigorous as ever.

Miss Alcott wrote as Shakespeare did, for all time and all generations. The element of immortal youth is in all her work, and abounds throughout the story of her life, which the following pages will strive to tell.

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LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

CHAPTER I

LOUISA MAY ARRIVES

NOVEMBER'S child of many moods arrived on the 29th day, 1832, sharing the birthday of her father and Christopher Columbus, if we can believe the records, and she first opened her eyes in a large, square, old-fashioned house in old-fashioned Germantown, not far from Philadelphia. It was somewhat off the main street, and was known as *The Pinery* or *Pine Place*, because of the pines surrounding it, so Louisa's tiny nose sniffed the sweet, pungent odour before she even thought it worth while to take a peep at the world.

Her father and mother, being old-fashioned people, were delighted with the new baby, who would be such a fine playmate for little Anna, just two years old, and though they were as poor as poor could be, they welcomed the newcomer with all their loving hearts, little dreaming that she would prove to be a regular fairy luck child.

The first thing she did of any consequence was to send her regards to her grandfather, Colonel May, to whom Mr. Alcott wrote at once, announcing her arrival. At the end of the letter he says :

“ With Abba’s [Mrs. Alcott’s], Anna’s, and Louisa’s regards, allow me to assure you of the sincerity with which I am,

“ Yours,

“ A. BRONSON ALCOTT.”

How quaint and stiff and formal those old-time letters were !

By all accounts Louisa was a beautiful baby, a delight to play with, to cuddle, and to kiss. And though Germantown happened by accident to be her birthplace, she was—from the crown of her head to the toes of her active feet—of sturdy New England stuff.

Her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, was born in 1799, thirty-three years before Louisa came, at the foot of Spindle Hill, in the region called New Connecticut. His family name in our old English records had been Alcocke, and belonged to a line of English gentlemen who went over to America and took up farming in New England. Some called the name Alcox, but when Amos Bronson and his cousin William set out to seek their fortunes, they changed it to Alcott ; while another branch of the family called themselves Olcott.

Mrs. Alcott was the twelfth and youngest child of Colonel Joseph May, and was related also to the Quincys and Sewalls of Massachusetts fame. Her brother, Samuel J. May, was a Unitarian minister, and a very prominent man in his day—a day of many great men. Mrs. Alcott was a woman of grace and refinement, so little Louisa and her sisters, the four “ Little Women ”—*Meg, Jo, Beth,* and

Amy—so dear to every girl's heart, had a rich heritage by birth, no matter how little they had of other riches.

Mr. Alcott was teaching school when Louisa was born, but he had new ways of teaching which the stolid Germantown people did not like, so his school was not successful, and he moved to Boston when Louisa was two years old—a chubby little mischief, who “got lost” on her very first journey.

They travelled by boat from Philadelphia to Boston; Anna and Louisa, spick and span, in clean nankeen suits, when it was suddenly discovered that Louisa was missing. High and low they searched, until at last they found her in the engine room, placidly poking into places that were “all nice and dirty”—looking, no doubt, “all nice and dirty,” too. How she came there she never explained; she might have been on a voyage of discovery, or made friends with the engine man, or wanted to “see the wheels go round,” for she was of a most inquiring mind, but at any rate she had enjoyed herself.

In Boston the real home life began. It would have been hard to find a happier couple than Mr. Alcott and his wife, and the two little girls grew and expanded in an atmosphere of love and intelligence. Mr. Alcott became head of the Temple School, where he felt free to teach his new ideas in his own way; but Louisa was too young to attend school except for an occasional visit, though her education began at an unusually early age. Kindergartens were unknown in those days, yet Mr. Alcott was ahead of his time and had real kindergarten ideas about making study pleasant for the

children, whose quick minds flew to knowledge. Two more little girls were added to the family group. Elizabeth, the *Beth* of "Little Women," was born during the six years spent in Boston; there was also a tiny boy who never lived; then came Abbey May, the baby and pet of the family, *Amy* in the story, who was born in the happy Concord days that immediately followed the unfortunate years in Boston.

Louisa at a very early age began to have "thinks," one could scarcely call them thoughts, for they went on all the time and were too large and indefinite to classify. This small person, in moments when her animal spirits were not leading her into paths of strange adventure, was much given to reflection; her little soul was a turbulent, unruly thing; she was often sad because of it, and had her fits of gloom like many an older person. But a whiff of fresh air, a kindly word, the sense of human companionship and sympathy, worked a magic cure, and she would be once more the hearty, happy child, who "loved everybody in *dis* whole world."

Such a nature as hers could not have had two better guides. Her father encouraged this habit of reflection, and discussed her small troubles with her as gravely as he handled heavier matters, while her mother steered her safely through the practical details of her daily life, each fired with the unselfish desire to give the best to the little girl.

From the time they could guide their pens and put their thoughts on paper, the Alcott children were required to keep a journal and write down freely their thoughts and doings from day to day.

These journals were always open for inspection and guiding criticism from both father and mother, and became fine records of the growth of mind and character.

Food for the mind was placed first in Mr. Alcott's ideas of education. It was his conviction that the simplest food for the body produced the highest thinking and living, and the children were brought up on this principle. "Goodies" such as children love never came their way, unless in the shape of fruits. What was plucked from trees or plants or dug from the ground was healthy, natural food in his opinion, while he considered it wrong to eat and enjoy anything which had to be killed for the purpose. But during the Boston days, when the children were too young to be reasoned with, they found that rice without sugar, and Graham meal minus butter or molasses, was most uninteresting fare and extremely tiresome. A lady friend, who chanced to be living in luxury at a hotel in Boston, fell into the habit of saving delicious bits of pie and cake for the young Alcotts, and Louisa often carried them home in a bandbox, which she brought for that purpose. Years afterwards, when she became famous, she met this friend in the street and greeted her cordially.

"Why, my dear!" exclaimed the old lady, "I did not think you would remember me."

"Do you think I shall ever forget that bandbox?" replied Louisa quickly.

Still it seems highly improbable that Mr. Alcott deprived his children entirely of meat, for in his diary, speaking of their healthy appetites, he says

of Louisa: "She enjoys her food, partaking of animal food with great relish."

Her first memory of herself is of playing with the books in her father's study, "building houses and bridges of the big dictionaries and diaries, looking at pictures, pretending to read, and scribbling on blank pages, whenever pen or pencil could be found."

"On one occasion," she says, in a sketch of her childhood, "we built a high tower around baby Lizzie, as she sat playing with her toys on the floor, and being attracted by something out of doors, forgot our little prisoner. A search was made, and patient baby at last discovered curled up and fast asleep in her dungeon cell, out of which she emerged so rosy and smiling after her nap, that we were forgiven for our carelessness."

The Alcotts always celebrated their birthdays with great enthusiasm. The gifts were hidden from view, the queen of the festival was escorted to the seat of honour to the sound of a march, always a moment of overwhelming embarrassment, until the packages were opened and thanks and kisses sprinkled liberally. Louisa's memory of her fourth birthday is very vivid; she celebrated it in her father's schoolroom at Masonic Temple. She wore a crown of flowers and stood on a table to receive congratulations from all the children. As each of her guests passed by, the "birthday girl" bestowed a small cake, but by some accident the cakes fell short, and when Louisa came to the last one it was suddenly borne in upon her that if she gave it away she would have none left for herself. This seemed

most unjust as it was *her* birthday, but a few wise words from her mother turned the scale.

"It is always better to give away than to keep the nice things ; so I know my Louy will not let the little friend go without."

"So," writes Miss Alcott, "the little friend received the dear, plummy cake, and I a kiss, and my first lesson in the sweetness of self-denial."

Little Louisa had one sad habit ; she was fond of running away, and on one of these interesting occasions she spent the day with some Irish children, who shared a very frugal and a very salty dinner with her, after which they played in the ash heaps, and later took a trip to the Common. Presently her friends deserted her ; it grew dark, and she began to long for home. She finally sat on a welcome doorstep beside a friendly big dog, who kindly allowed her to use his back as a pillow. She was roused from sleep by the town crier, who had been sent in search of her by her distracted parents. She says : "His bell and proclamation of the loss of 'a little girl six years old, in a pink frock, white hat, and new green shoes' woke me up, and a small voice answered out of the darkness : 'Why, dat's me' !"

Very much the same thing happened to *Naughty Nan* in "Little Men," when she and *Rob* got lost, and it seems that Louisa's escapade was punished as *Nan's* was. The runaway was tied to the arm of a sofa next day, to cure her of the wandering habit. She was an athletic little soul ; she loved to climb trees and leap fences and run races like a young deer or colt. It was nothing unusual for her to drive her

hoop around the Common, and her friendships were always based on powers of achievement. Barring her own sisters, girls were nothing to her unless they were tomboys, but boys appealed to her through their prowess ; the boy who could not equal her in lively sports deserved no place in her friendship ; he who excelled was worshipped as a hero, and Louisa had many heroes in her active youth.

At the age of seven her particular idol was a certain Frank, who was a lord of creation and loftily permitted her devotion. He used to amuse himself by slapping her hands with books, hoopsticks, shoes, or anything which could give a good stinging blow, hoping to make her cry ; but she bore the pain with fortitude, quite repaid when she heard him tell the other boys, " she's a brave little thing and you can't make her cry." There were long days of romping, and happy evenings snuggled in sofa corners, planning tricks and eating stolen " goodies," and " sometimes," she tells us in " My Boys," a jolly little story of her early loves, " Frank would put his curly head in my lap and let me stroke it when he was tired." But this boy, alas ! proved treacherous and gave his adorer up to a punishment which she had justly deserved, but which she had tried to escape by locking herself in the dining room ; this false friend, with the twinkling eyes and the curly hair, climbed in at the window and unlocked the door, adding insult to injury by helping to bear her off to imprisonment. This was a sad blow to Louisa ; *she* would have been staunch and true under any circumstances, and she never forgave this first love of hers, though he tempted her with offers

of peanuts and candy, ginger snaps and car rides. She had lost faith in his loyalty.

Loyalty was a star characteristic of the Alcott family. No matter what the cause or how forlorn the hope, if he deemed it just and wise, and for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, Mr. Alcott fought for it with his whole soul, and clung to it with his whole strength. Shoulder to shoulder with him stood his brave wife, loyally supporting him, while her capable hands toiled to make the burdens lighter, and the little girls—each early impressed with the responsibility of looking after her soul—were always loyal to the trust and to each other, and to the father and mother, to whom they so freely brought their small troubles and perplexities.

So the home of the Alcotts was rich in love and loyalty, but poor in worldly goods. Mr. Alcott's Boston school began to dwindle sadly, until he found himself at last with but five pupils, three of whom were his own daughters. This was unfortunate, for he was a born teacher, enthusiastic, cultured, and devoted to young people. He has said himself: "When one becomes indifferent to women, to children and to young people, he may know that he is superannuated, and has withdrawn from whatsoever is sweetest and purest in human existence." The cause of his unpopularity was to be found in the very strong views he held on anti-slavery. Boston had not yet put on her war paint, and the single-minded gentleman almost lost caste on account of his advanced opinions. He was compelled to give up his school, and the "Pathetic Family," as Louisa often called them in later years,

moved to historic old Concord, where the three little girls found another little sister, and spent the happiest years of their lives.

Going to Concord, away from big and busy Boston, was like going into the country, and the three young ones always enjoyed that when they went on brief summer outings to Scituate. In Concord they had a pleasant house, a garden full of trees, and a big barn, which was their delight, and where they produced many marvellous plays, products of their own busy brains. Both Anna and Louisa had a wonderful gift for acting, and the old barn was the scene of many triumphs. They dramatized the fairy tales in fine style—"Jack and the Beanstalk," "Cinderella" and others. That moral tale of the foolish woman who wasted her three wishes was admirably illustrated by a big black pudding, which was lowered by invisible hands until it fastened itself upon her nose.

Playing pilgrims was a favourite amusement when they were little. "Sometimes," as Miss Alcott tells us in her recollections, they "journeyed over the hill with scrip and staff and cockle-shells in their hats." At other times, so vividly described in "Little Women," their mother tied her piece-bags on their backs for burdens, gave them hats, sticks, and rolls of paper, and sent them from the cellar, which was the City of Destruction, to the housetop, which was the Celestial City, and being nothing if not dramatic, as well as little earnest, toiling Christians, they acted out their progress during their upward journey. There was plenty of religion in the Alcott household, moments of



THE THEATRE OF 1848.

"Those Concord days were the happiest of my life. Plays in the barn were a favorite amusement."

L. M. Alcott.

holy enthusiasm, born of Nature and the love of it.

One can fancy Louisa's restless feet taking her over the hills at dawn one summer morning ; the rest in the silent woods, the glimpse of the sun rising over the hills, were awe-inspiring to the thoughtful child. She tells us herself that she felt as she had never felt before, God's presence near her, and, as she says, she got religion in that quiet hour.

Here, in the open, they learned their lessons, charming nature lessons, with their father as teacher. Their mother was generally with them in their hours of recreation ; she was an admirable manager, and she made it a rule to rise early in the morning, to finish all the work in the forenoon, so that the afternoon could be devoted to the children. This was a time of wandering in the woods under clear summer skies, telling stories, playing games, and spouting poetry. There were friends, too, to share these pleasures, the young Emersons, the Hawthornes, the Channings, and the Goodwins—all children of remarkable parents.

Dr. Edward W. Emerson, one of the " boys," gives us a delightful glimpse of Mrs. Alcott in her relations with her children : " She was not only loving and sympathetic, but she had a well-stored and fertile mind. From her they learned to depend on themselves for good times, and their imaginations were quickened. The zeal of the mother in helping on her children's little plans appears in a touching sentence in a story of Louisa's, describing a school masquerade such as we had later. The fathers might grudge the expense, ' But the mothers,

whose interest in their children's pleasure is a sort of evergreen that no frost of time can kill, sewed spangles by the bushel, and made wildernesses of tissue paper blossom like the rose, kept tempers sweet, stomachs full, and domestic machinery working through it all, by that maternal magic which makes them the human providences of this naughty world.' "

Louisa became the devoted mother of a doll at the age of seven, and her mother wrote the following letter to go with the birthday gift :

"MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL :

"Will you accept this doll from me on your seventh birthday? She will be a quiet playmate for my active Louisa for seven years more. Be a kind mamma and love her for my sake.

"YOUR MOTHER.

"Beach Street, Boston, 1839."

Dolls were always a source of pleasure to the Alcott children ; they became living things in their possession. Louisa put hers through every experience of life, and at twelve she was a regular doll's dressmaker, hung out her sign and invited custom.

Those early Concord days saw the first dawning of creative power in the little girl, and the poem written to the half-starved robin they found in the garden one cold morning, and warmed and fed, was Louisa's first effort. It was written when she was eight years old.

TO THE FIRST ROBIN.

Welcome, welcome, little stranger,
Fear no harm and fear no danger ;
We are glad to see you here,
For you sing " Sweet Spring is near."

Now the white snow melts away ;
Now the flowers blossom gay :
Come, dear bird, and build your nest,
For we love our robin best.

Mrs. Alcott was so delighted that she predicted that Louisa would become a second Shakespeare ; and indeed from this time the little girl's many thoughts took shape in verse, and the pen which her mother gave her on her tenth birthday was thereafter put into active service. Perhaps the best record of these little " pilgrims' progress " is found in their father's diaries. He knew each child, to the core of her innocent heart. Louisa and Anna, so near of an age, were totally different in character. Anna was spirited, but sweet and tractable at most times, but Louisa was turbulent. If Anna had anything she, Louisa, wanted, she claimed it at once, with " entreaties, tears, even blows."

On one occasion the subject of dispute was a certain rocking chair, in which both wanted to sit. They were very angry, and the fight was hot, when Mr. Alcott interfered.

" Anna, can you not give up the chair to your sister ? " he asked.

" No, I cannot," was her prompt reply.

" I will leave you to try then," he went on.

" Very well, father, I will try," she answered

coolly, "and now I think we can get along without you."

Mr. Alcott retreated to his study, but the noise grew so unbearable that he was forced to rush again to the rescue. This time he separated the combatants, and the bribe of an apple lured Anna peaceably to the study.

"And now, Anna," said her father, as she sat placidly nibbling the rosy fruit, "did you give up the chair to Louisa because you loved your sister, or because you wanted the apple?"

"Because I wanted the apple," she calmly replied.

Thinking to make more impression on the victorious Louisa, he paid a third visit to the nursery—the seat of battle. Of this visit he made no record, beyond the brief statement that—

"Louisa had taken the chair!"

The nursery was a place of delight to the youngsters for acting out the stories Father told them in the twilight—the children's hour. They would go to bed with their eager young minds full of sprites and fairies, good and bad angels, smiling skies, crystal raindrops, gurgling waters, and beautiful gardens with bright walls around them, and the next day they would remember the stories in their own fanciful way. One of these tales they called "The Garden of Goodness." Another favourite was "The Story of a Little Feeling," a tale in which Love and Hate fought for a little girl's heart. This was acted with great success.

Indeed, whatever particularly impressed them they acted out at once, Louisa taking the principal parts, as soon as she had overcome her baby lisp,

Anna slipping good-naturedly into the second place.

On their nursery bookshelves could be found all the best reading for children in those days, and to the girls of to-day the following list of well-selected books must look queer and old-fashioned.

LIST OF THE ALCOTT BOOKS.

Frank.	}	MISS EDGEWORTH.
Cherry Orchard.		
Liar and Boys of Truth.	}	MRS. BARBOUR.
Lessons for Children.		
Little Henri.	}	ANN AND JANE TAYLOR.
Original Poems for Infant Minds.		
Rhymes for the Nursery.	}	MRS. CRABB.
Familiar Tales.		
The Rosebud.	}	MRS. FOLLEN.
The Daisy.		
The Cowslip.	}	WILSON.
Little Rhymes.		
The Child's Gem.	}	MRS. HALES.
Hannah Lee.		
Little Woman and Pedlar.	}	
Mother Goose.		
Poems for Children.		
Babes in the Wood.		
Cinderella.		
The Looking Glass.		

A funny collection, but gems to the Alcott children, who made the best use of them, acting out each story to their own satisfaction. "The Old Woman and the Pedlar" was a special favourite and called forth much applause.

Louisa's earliest responsibility, a responsibility which fell heavily on each of the "Little Women," was her conscience. The careful father had early taught them that conscience consisted of a mind and

a soul. The mind was a round room, and the soul a little creature with wings, that lived in it. The walls were full of shelves and drawers, in which they kept their thoughts, and there were goodness and badness and all sorts of things. The goodness could always be seen, and the badness was always locked up tight. But it got out somehow and they had a hard time putting it back and squeezing it down, it was so strong. Louisa often played with her thoughts when she was alone or in bed, and many a night she would wake up to see the moon streaming through her window, and turn to her thoughts for company. Every Sunday she put her room in order, and talked with the little spirit that lived there, in very much the grown-up way that her father talked to her. Though at times she shook her head despondently because her room was in disorder, and though the lock was not always strong enough to keep the badness shut up, there was always Father to consult about putting better things in the drawer, and Mother to help to clear away cobwebs from the nooks and corners where the badness lay hidden, and an earnest, ardent little girl, who was beginning to have high thoughts and noble purposes, and her own opinion of men and things.

CHAPTER II

A SIMPLE LIFE

WHEN Louisa was nearly ten years old, Mr. Alcott went to England where he met a great many people who agreed with his peculiar ideas of education and of living. For a long time he had been thinking of a plan which would enable a large number of people to live under the same roof in absolute harmony and brotherly love. It was to be a little community, each member of which, by the work of his or her friends, was to add a share to the "family" support. Their watchwords were to be love and purity; simple living and high thinking were to mark their daily lives. In his great, loving mind, arose a picture of this ideal home, and he presented it so beautifully to the eyes of his friends that they became enthusiastic, and many promised to join him in this scheme.

One of these, a Mr. Lane, came back to America with Mr. Alcott, and for many months he made his home with the Alcott family, while plans were discussed and kindred spirits were drawn into the experiment. After much talk they decided to secure a small estate of about a hundred acres, suitable for agriculture and fruit growing, and this they found at last near the village of Harvard, Mass., called no

doubt after the John Harvard who gave his name to the college at Cambridge. This property was situated most beautifully on a hillside sloping to the river, with lovely views to the west, while in the background rose the towering, tree-covered summit of Prospect Hill. The eager philosophers named the place *Fruitlands* in anticipation of harvests to come, and from Miss Alcott herself, in a clever little story called "Transcendental Wild Oats," we have the following account of the journey of the Alcott family to their new home :

"On the first day of June, 184—, a large wagon, drawn by a small horse and containing a motley load, went lumbering over certain New England hills with the pleasing accompaniment of wind, rain, and hail. A serene man, with a serene child upon his knee, was driving, or rather being driven, for the small horse had it all his own way. A brown boy, with a William Penn sort of countenance, sat beside him, firmly embracing a bust of Socrates. Behind them was an energetic-looking woman, with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth, and eyes full of hope and courage. A baby reposed upon her lap, a mirror leaned against her knee, and a basket of provisions danced about at her feet, as she struggled with a large, unruly umbrella. Two blue-eyed little girls, with hands full of childish treasures, sat under one old shawl, chatting happily together."

There was no road leading to the house, which could not be seen that rainy afternoon through the blur of the landscape, and there is no doubt that the large wagon and the small horse floundered helplessly in the mud many times on the journey, until

they drew up at last before the old red farmhouse which was to be their home, just as a beautiful rainbow broke through the gray sky at the close of the day. So, looking on this as an omen of good cheer, the little girls sprang from the wagon in high spirits, and the older people followed, with baskets, bundles, umbrella, and baby. The mirror had long ago met its fate with a crash.

There was a glimmer of light shining from the windows of the old red house, but there was no furniture as yet, so the tired Alcott family sat on blocks of wood, and enjoyed a supper of roasted potatoes, brown bread and water, and went to bed—Heaven knows where or how—for history has left no record of that first night at *Fruitlands*.

It must have been a queer change for the three little girls. Baby May, of course, was too young to think much about her surroundings, and Lizzie, happy little soul, would have been contented anywhere with those she loved best around her. But Anna and Louisa opened their blue eyes questioningly and sometimes disapprovingly. They loved the country, and even the surroundings of the house were alluring; the old barn, the orchard, the meadow lands beyond, and the beautiful grove, so full of a dim, religious calm; but the regulations for everyday living were too much for such independent youngsters. The rule of the household was to rise at dawn and go to bed at sunset, and it is no wonder that poor Louisa spent many wakeful hours in bed, and had to recite poetry to lull herself to sleep.

There are many people in the world who are only

too eager to laugh at the efforts of those who try to make it better, and poor Mr. Alcott, for all his lofty ideals, was laughed at by friends and foes, who stood apart to watch the experiment. Mrs. Alcott did not share her husband's dreams of simplicity and purity, but she respected his wishes in regard to the bringing-up of their little girls, whose healthy young appetites looked for nothing better than the fruit of the tree and the products of the earth. This coming to *Fruitlands*, they fondly believed, was to be a perpetual picnic.

The furniture for their new home arrived the next day, and then the plan of living was discussed ; of course, by the elders, the duty of the young ones was to obey.

Mr. Lane, Mr. Alcott's English friend, made himself master of *Fruitlands*, and proceeded to govern his little colony with a firmness which amounted to severity. During the time he lived in the Alcott household, before the experiment was put into practice, he had taught the little girls, but he had never won their hearts nor gained their confidence. Perhaps they resented the calm manner in which he thrust their clever father, whom they adored, into the background, while he decided what should or should not be done.

The question of clothes was the very first thing to be discussed. Mr. Alcott suggested linen, and his idea was adopted at once, as it was summer and nobody thought of the cold weather. Mr. Lane said that nothing must be used which caused wrong or death to man or beast, and as silk was made by the killing of the silkworms, wool by robbing the

sheep of their coats, and cotton by the labour of slaves, linen was all that was left. The entire "family" wore tunics and trousers of brown linen. The women's skirts were longer, and their straw hat-brims were wider than the men's, and that was the only difference in costume. As to shoes, no one could think at first of anything but leather. Bark, wood, or some durable fabric might be invented in time, but those who wished might go barefooted. Here Mrs. Alcott had a word: "I never will, nor my girls either," she said firmly. The four little girls must have presented a strange picture in such attire, but they played and romped quite happily, for the lack of pretty clothes was the least of their worries. What to eat, or at least what *not* to eat, was a much more serious question.

Poor Mrs. Alcott wrung her capable hands in despair when she took command of their grim-looking kitchen and the responsibility of their daily bill of fare. She had eleven in the family, afterwards increased to sixteen, and her larder contained "cakes of maple sugar, dried peas and beans, barley and hominy, meal of all sorts, potatoes and dried fruit." Milk, butter, cheese, tea, and meat were forbidden, and salt and spices were looked upon as useless luxuries. Now what could the best of cooks do under those circumstances? If Mrs. Alcott had not been blessed with a wonderful disposition and power of endurance, she could never have pulled through the experiment, but having lived on a vegetable diet for many years, she managed to give her hungry nestlings the following rich fare during these days:

For Breakfast—Unleavened bread, porridge, and water.

For Dinner—Bread, vegetables, and water.

For Supper—Bread, fruit, and water.

Fancy four jolly little girls pinned down to such food day after day, with no "extra best" for Sundays!

In those days there was no kerosene oil; what was used in the lamps was made of some animal substance, and the wise ones decreed that no oil should be used until some vegetable oil or wax was discovered, but, after several experiments, Mrs. Alcott rebelled again. Evening was her only time of rest, and she could then mend the torn dresses and darn the stockings of her little girls. So "Mother's Lamp" became a fixture, while the wise men who ruled at *Fruitlands* sat out in the moonlight, when there *was* a moon, and talked over their plans and hopes; but we may be pretty certain that when it rained, some of them clustered round that same despised lamp, glad of its genial rays.

The farmers had the hardest time of all; they laboured entirely with their hands, spading and hoeing, until blisters and aching backs made a plough absolutely necessary; then, one of the "brothers" brought a yoke of oxen from his farm. "So," Miss Alcott writes, "the philosophers *thought*, until it was discovered that one of the animals was a cow, and Moses confessed that he 'must be let down easy, for he couldn't live on garden sarse entirely.' " But time pressed, the work must be done, "so the meek cow was permitted to wear the yoke, and the recreant 'brother' continued to enjoy forbidden

draughts [of milk] in the barn, which dark proceeding caused the children to regard him as one set apart for destruction."

There were only two women at *Fruitlands*, Mrs. Alcott and Miss Anna Page, who gave the children music lessons. She is described by Miss Alcott in after life as "a stout lady of mature years, sentimental, amiable and lazy." In Louisa's childish journal she expresses herself more forcibly: "I had a music lesson with Miss P. I hate her, she is so fussy."

This lady either could not or would not help with the household drudgery, and on one occasion when asked how many beasts of burden were on the place, Mrs. Alcott replied, "Only one woman." The placid Miss Page laughed with the others at the joke, but still she did not "lend a hand." She left very soon under the most humiliating circumstances; she had been caught by one of the children eating the tail of a fish at a neighbour's house! Her terrible conduct was reported and she was severely scolded, whereupon she packed up bag and baggage and departed in high dudgeon.

Anna and Louisa put their sturdy little shoulders to the wheel and "helped mother" between study hours. Here are some examples of their daily life taken from Louisa's journal written during that first year, 1843, when she was ten years old:

"*September 1st.*—I rose at five and had my bath; I love cold water! Then we had our singing lesson with Mr. Lane. After breakfast I washed dishes, and ran on the hill till nine, and had some thoughts—it was so beautiful up there. Did my lessons—

wrote and spelt and did some sums ; and Mr. Lane read a story, ' The Judicious Father.' . . . Father asked us what was God's noblest work. Anna said *men*, but I said *babies*. Men are often bad ; babies never are. We had a long talk and I felt better after it and *cleared up*."

It is very plain that Louisa was puzzled over the term " men " ; *babies* evidently, in her small mind, belonged to another order of human beings, and it cost her father some trouble to explain to his inquiring little daughter that babies and men were really the flower and fruit of the same tree. Louisa continues :

" We had bread and fruit for dinner. I read and walked and played till supper time. We sang in the evening. As I went to bed the moon came up very brightly and looked at me. I felt sad because I have been cross to-day and did not mind Mother. I cried and then I felt better and said that piece from Mrs. Sigourney, ' I must not tease my Mother.' I get to sleep saying poetry. I know a great deal."

" *Thursday, 11th.*—Mr. Parker Pillsbury came and we talked about the poor slaves."

This was always an absorbing subject to Louisa, as it was to every member of the family. At the age of two, her mother says, she showed a strong leaning towards anti-slavery. Certain it is that from the time a coloured boy saved her from drowning in the Frog Pond in Boston she became a staunch friend of the slaves, and had she been a man when the war came, she would gladly have marched to battle for their freedom.

She speaks of a run in the woods upon the same day, where she played being a horse and had a lovely time with Anna and Lizzie. They played fairies and made gowns and paper wings, and she "fled" highest of all. Dear little girl! She was always flying high in her imagination and falling short in her small efforts, and examining her small sins in her merciless child fashion.

On Sunday, October 21st, she says: "Father and Mr. Lane have gone to New Hampshire to preach. It was very lovely."

We cannot help smiling and wondering if she meant it was lovely at *Fruilands* without the preaching. Anna and Louisa got supper, not such hard work considering the bill of fare.

On the 8th of October, her mother's birthday, Louisa made a moss cross and wrote a piece of poetry for her. They had no school, but played in the woods and gathered red leaves. In the evening they danced and sang. Louisa read a story about "Contentment" and wished "that she was rich and good and all were a happy family this day."

"Tuesday, October 12th.—After lessons I ironed. We all went to the barn and husked corn, it was good fun. We worked till eight o'clock and had lamps. Mr. Russell came. Mother and Lizzie are going to Boston. I shall be very lonely without dear little Betty, and no one will be as good to me as Mother. I read in *Plutarch*. I made a verse about sunset:

"Softly doth the sun descend
To his couch behind the hill,
Then, oh, then I love to sit
On mossy banks beside the rill.

"Anna thought it was very fine ; but I didn't like it very well."

It was no uncommon thing for Anna and Louisa to do the housework, and in the evening when they were very tired, Mr. Lane would ask, in a casual way, a question for discussion, for instance : "What is man ?" These weary little girls were required to answer intelligently, after which ensued a long talk, and they went to bed exhausted.

But there were moments of real joy for the young folks, in spite of many privations. Every event in the family, every celebration was a woodland festival. On little May's third birthday she was escorted by the entire household at *Fruitlands* to the grove which was reserved for gala occasions. Here she was crowned with flowers, and an ode, written by her father, was recited by him in celebration of the opening of this paradise.

Their gifts to one another were always Nature's treasures, for money being forbidden, it would have been hard to secure anything else ; and many were the dainty things the Alcott children learned to make, and doubtless the pressed wild flowers and artistic efforts in moss gave just as much pleasure as more costly articles. Then the little girls had their dolls, and much time was happily passed in working for them and making them gay clothes, quite unlike the sober linens *they* were forced to wear.

And so with plenty of work and study and play, the first summer at *Fruitlands* passed uneventfully enough, and the little girls were learning to accept

with patience and cheerfulness their very queer lot in life.

The days grew shorter, and the grain was stacked ready to house. It was not much of a harvest, but it had to be brought in. Mrs. Alcott, always watchful for the good of others, noticed that a storm was coming up, and she knew the rain would ruin the yellow stacks. She had no time to lose, and not a man on the place to help her; all were away on some *higher* mission. So she gathered her forces, which consisted of Anna, Louisa, Lizzie, Mr. Lane's son and herself, who were harnessed to clothes baskets and linen sheets; these were the only teams she could command, but the plucky lady set out undaunted, and got in the grain just in time to save it from destruction.

Indeed, had it not been for her constant provision and foresight, the little colony would have gone to pieces long before it did, as it was sustained on little more than high spirits and everlasting hope. They discovered that they could not support themselves on pure living, that provisions of the simplest kind had to be paid for, and the use of money being forbidden, it was often found impossible to obtain even the barest necessities of life in any other way. But Mr. Alcott's philosophy never wavered. He was a reformer who took his own medicine, and the beautiful allegories and fables which he created for the education of the young ones preached lessons of patience, endurance, and perseverance, which sank deep into their childish hearts and helped them through the hard winter indoors.

Yet even winter held compensations for these

small philosophers ; there were the long evenings around the lamp, with father and mother, quite alone. Then Anna and Louisa would sew for their dolls, and Mother would sew for them, and Father would read aloud from Plato, or Plutarch, or from dear "Pilgrim's Progress," as on one occasion Louisa mentions in her journal. Mr. Lane was in Boston, whereat they rejoiced. It was not often the Alcotts could talk among themselves of their worries and perplexities, but on this night the two little girls joined the family council and there was a long, confidential talk, for things were looking very dark for *Fruitlands*.

"We all cried," writes Louisa, "Anna and I cried in bed, and I prayed God to keep us all together." So there must have been some hint of sending the little girls away, for a while, from all this poverty and privation. It seemed, however, that the separation had to come, for Anna left home soon after, and Louisa missed her dreadfully. These two little sisters, so near of an age, were all in all to each other. Their lessons ran along the same lines, their journals recorded the same events, each one writing in her own characteristic fashion. Their numerous dramas, or at least melodramas, were the joint products of their vivid imaginations, and these they acted together in the old barn, Anna preferring the sentimental parts, and Louisa anything which required action and dialogue, even taking the villain's parts if they filled these requirements. So with Anna away, one can well imagine Louisa's loneliness, which at the age of eleven she expressed in this fashion :

TO ANNA.

Sister, dear, when you are lonely,
Longing for your distant home,
And the images of loved ones
Warmly to your heart shall come,
Then, mid tender thoughts and fancies,
Let one fond voice say to thee,
"Ever when your heart is heavy,
Anna, dear, then think of me."
Think how we two have together
Journeyed onward day by day,
Joys and sorrows ever sharing,
While the swift years roll away.
Then may all the sunny hours
Of our youth rise up to thee,
And when your heart is light and happy,
Anna, dear, then think of me.

Besides the journals, the children had imagination books, in which they were allowed to write anything that popped into their busy little heads, and this was a constant source of delight to Louisa, who was always thinking of something original, and she had arrived at an age when she was greedily drinking in knowledge from all sources. During the *Fruitlands* experiment, which lasted from her tenth to her thirteenth year, she read Plato, Socrates, Plutarch, Scott, Martin Luther, Miss Bremer, Bettine's correspondence with Goethe; and "Philothea," a story by Mrs. Child, charmed her so much that the young Alcotts dramatized it, and acted it with much glory, under the trees. Every spot to them was a place to act in; they might have said with Shakespeare, "All the world's a stage," for no nook or corner was too sacred for their art. The countless other things she must have read are not recorded, but the active brain was never at rest in waking hours.

About this time she came into possession of what was, to her, a kingdom—a room of her very own—where she could be alone whenever she liked, and dream her dreams, and allow her wild fancies to take shape and soar. The little girl was a thing of the past ; she was now in her teens and she began seriously to plan out her future. She was old for her age ; many people thought her queer because she did not care for girls' things. But she *did* care about being good and trying to help her mother, already so sorely overtaxed.

The love between the two was very beautiful. Mrs. Alcott understood the struggles of her wayward little daughter, sympathizing with the turbulent spirit within her which made her so restless, so eager to be always doing, and the sweet, motherly notes, full of encouragement and advice, which Louisa often found between the pages of her journal, were very comforting. Here is an example of their private correspondence, written before the little room had become a reality :

“ DEAREST MOTHER :

“ I have tried to be more contented, and I think I have been more so. I have been thinking about my little room, which I suppose I never shall have. I should want to be there about all the time, and I should go there and sing and think.

“ But I'll be contented
With what I have got,
Of folly repented,
Then sweet is my lot.

“ From your trying daughter,

“ LOUISA.”

“MY DEAR LOUISA :

“Your note gave me so much delight that I cannot close my eyes without first thanking you, dear, for making me so happy, and blessing God, who gave you this tender love for your mother.

“I have observed all day your patience with baby, your obedience to me, and your kindness to all. Go on ‘trying,’ my child ; God will give you strength and courage, and help you to fill each day with words and deeds of love. I shall lay this on your pillow, put a warm kiss on your lips, and say a little prayer over you in your sleep.

“MOTHER.”

The following poem was written by Louisa at the age of eleven, when the poor people at *Fruitlands* seemed to be in very low spirits :

Silent and sad
When all is glad,
And earth is dressed in flowers ;
When the gay birds sing
Till the forests ring,
As they rest in woodland bowers.

Oh ! why these tears,
And these idle fears,
For what may come to-morrow ?
The birds find food
From God so good,
And the flowers know no sorrow.

If He clothes these,
And the leafy trees,
Will He not cherish thee ?
Why doubt His care—
It is everywhere,
Tho’ the way we may not see.

Then why be sad,
When all is glad,
And the world is full of flowers ?
With the gay birds sing,
Make life all spring,
And smile thro' the darkest hours.

The seasons came and went, and things got worse and worse at *Fruitlands*. One by one the "family" dwindled, until finally Mr. Lane, seeing there was nothing more to gain in such a venture, decided to leave them and join the Shaker settlement, of which he had heard. So the poor Alcotts, deserted by those who should have fought it out with them, were left in the old red farmhouse, with neither wood for fire, nor corn for food, the coming winter staring them in the face, with no money, and scarcely a friend to whom they could apply for help. Mr. Alcott, worn out in mind and body, broke down at last, when he found himself alone and deserted. This wild scheme had cut him off from his friends ; some laughed, some thought him crazy, others would not help him until he turned to more practical things. And now he lived to know how unpractical *Fruitlands* was, and had been, from the beginning.

We must live as our neighbours live ; we may beautify that living as much as we please, but custom and habit are sure to be right in the main, or the majority would not follow where they lead, and he who turns aside must either turn an army with him, or be laughed at for his trouble.

This was the case with Mr. Alcott, and had it not been for his wife and little girls he would never have outlived the disappointment. The brave

"big woman" and the four dear "little women" stretched out loving hands, and pulled him through his despair. Mrs. Alcott wrote to her brother in Boston, who promptly came to their assistance, and she sold all the furniture she could spare, thus getting together a little money. Then she went to Still River, the nearest village to *Fruitlands*, and engaged four rooms from their good neighbours, the Lovejoys, and on one bleak December day the Alcott family emerged from the snowbank in which the old red farmhouse lay hidden. Their worldly goods were piled on an ox-sled, the four girls on the top, while father and mother trudged arm in arm behind, poorer indeed in worldly goods, but richer in love and faith and patience, and, alas, experience.

Fruitlands was *Fruitlands* no longer; Mrs. Alcott rechristened it *Apple Slump*.

The house where the Lovejoys lived was called "The Brick Ends," a plain, square house, looking from the outside like one of the toy houses of a Noah's Ark. The Alcotts occupied one side and the Lovejoys the other, and here the little family was mercifully housed and befriended during the long winter, when they regained their spirits with their usual elasticity. As long as they were all together nothing really mattered, so great was the family tie.

When spring came, the Still River young people became interested in their new neighbours. Gaiety began with a May party, with a Queen and Maypole, and one of these former children has given us an interesting account of Lizzie's birthday party on June 24th. It took place in Mrs. Lovejoy's kitchen,

which was dressed with evergreens and made a fitting stage for the evening's entertainment ; her sitting-room was the dress circle. The Alcotts' sitting-room was ornamented with a small tree, from the boughs of which hung gifts, not only for the birthday girl, but for each of her guests. In Mrs. Alcott's kitchen was spread the feast. How good it was to feast after all, if ever so simply ! There were small cakes, no doubt delicious if Mrs. Alcott made them ; there were cherries in profusion, and a great birthday cake in the centre. There were dramatic entertainments throughout the evening. Part of an old English play was given by the older girls ; the Alcotts and the Gardners are particularly mentioned. There were also songs in costume. Anna was a Scotch laddie in bonnet and plaid. But Louisa was the star of the evening. Her mother had stained her face, arms, and ankles, to make her look like an Indian girl, and she was very handsome in the costume so cleverly contrived for her. She sang some songs on that occasion that our mothers or our grandmothers may remember, for it is many years since this memorable birthday feast. One began :

Wild roved an Indian girl, sweet Alfarata.

Another :

The blackbird was singing
On Michigan's shore,
As sweetly and gaily as ever before.

She also recited, and did character sketches, and was pronounced by everyone to be the life of Lizzie's party.

There were many other festive occasions at Still River, but they were very poor and living was hard, so they determined to go back to Concord and begin again, a hard thing to do, but Mr. Alcott was brave. His possessions were few, but there was love enough in the family to furnish a palace, and indomitable courage to carry them through, so the brave pilgrims shouldered their burdens once more and pushed on.

CHAPTER III

THE HEART OF A GIRL

WITH the return to Concord, life began in earnest for Louisa and her sisters. The little home was very bare, for the work that came to Mr. Alcott was of the most trifling kind, and Mrs. Alcott knew that she must stifle all feelings of pride if she wished assistance from any of their friends. She stopped at no sort of work which could help them in their scanty living, and once back in the old town among familiar landmarks and familiar faces, their old friends came around them again and stretched forth kind hands to pull them on their feet. These friends were among the few who had not entirely forsaken them. They had not approved of the *Fruitlands* experiment, but even though they had smiled at its oddities, they had loved the simple kindliness of Mr. Alcott, and welcomed him warmly when he came back among them.

Foremost among these was Ralph Waldo Emerson, the philosopher and poet, who for many years had lived in Concord, and whose home was a meeting-place for the best thinkers and writers of the day. Like Mr. Alcott, he was a reformer, but he had the wonderful gift of persuasion, convincing people

by his very simplicity, and so turning them, gently and unconsciously, into new ways.

This great man represented the best thought of his time. He was among the first in New England to turn aside into broader paths of learning and research. He became a leader among such noted men as Ellery Channing, Thoreau, Theodore Parker, and many others known to fame, and his greatness has seemed to live above them all. Certain it is that he was loved by his friends, both young and old, and to-day his grave is visited by people from far and near, who knew and honoured him, either personally or through his writings.

From her earliest childhood Louisa had adored him. Her first remembrance of him dates back to the time when she was eight years old. She was sent to inquire for little Waldo, who was desperately ill, and Emerson himself opened the door to the little girl. Something in his face, so changed and worn by sorrow, startled her, and she could hardly stammer out her message. "Child—he is dead!" was his answer, as he closed the door gently, and Louisa, awed by her first glimpse of a grief too deep for words, ran home with the sad tidings to her anxious father and mother.

After they came back from *Fruitlands*, however, she gives us a brighter picture :

"Later," she writes, "when we went to school with the little Emersons, in their father's barn; I remember many times when their illustrious papa was our good playfellow. Often piling us into a bedecked hay cart, he took us to berry, bathe, or picnic at Walden [Henry Thoreau's haunt], making

our day charming and memorable by showing us the places he loved, the wood people Thoreau had introduced to him, or the wild flowers, whose hidden homes he had discovered, so that when years afterwards we read of 'the sweet rhodora in the woods' and the 'burly dozing bumblebee,' or laughed over 'The Mountain and the Squirrel,' we recognized old friends and thanked him for the delicate truth and beauty which made them immortal for us and others."

To the turbulent, restless, half-grown girl, the calm philosopher, with his gentle ways and practical common sense, was an anchor indeed. In her warm little heart he was held so sacredly that he himself would have smiled at such worship. But it did Louisa good; it came to her when her eager young mind was seeking for higher things, something apart from the everyday cares and worries of the struggling home.

She went to him for advice about her reading. She used to enter his library, no doubt in the way *Jo* entered Mr. Lawrence's, and ask him what she should read. With the blessed audacity of youth, she never dreamed that she might be wasting his valuable time; but no time, in Emerson's opinion, was ever wasted in helping young people; and under his guidance Louisa began to know the riches of Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, and Carlyle. She was at liberty to roam all around his book-lined walls and select what pleased her most. If it chanced to be too old for her, he would say quietly: "Wait a little for that; meanwhile try this, and if you like it, come again," and the girl would go

home to read and absorb what he had selected for her.

It was after reading Bettine's correspondence with Goethe that Louisa began to place her father's friend upon a pedestal, and worship him in true romantic fashion, as Bettine worshipped Goethe. She fell to writing poetry ; she kept what she called her " heart journal," and took to wandering in the moonlight, when she should have been safe in her bed. She wrote letters to him full of wild romance, but she never sent them, though she told him about them in after years, when he and she could laugh together over her girlish fancy. Once, she tells us, she sat in a tall cherry-tree at midnight and sang to the moon till the owls scared her to bed ; she left wild flowers on her " Master's " doorstep, and sang Mignon's song under his window, in very bad German.

All this sounds absurd, but it was sober earnest to the little girl in her teens, and Emerson was the safest sort for a girl to love—so gentle, so serene, so wise, yet with a simple everyday reasoning power, as sound at the core as a winter apple.

There was still another teacher whose influence was a great force in Louisa's life. This was Henry Thoreau, the poet and naturalist. From him the Alcott girls learned to know the Nature they already loved, and many a happy day was spent with him, studying the secrets of the wild flowers and the language of the birds. Louisa drank in the delight of it all, and everything she wrote in later life shows just that loving knowledge of Nature which makes all her stories so attractive.

Thoreau was a genius, as much a part of the Concord soil as the trees and the flowers which were rooted there. He was born in the placid little town, and was quite content to live and die there. He believed, with Emerson, that travelling was a "fool's paradise," and when occasionally he did go off on brief excursions, it was only to return far more satisfied with Concord and its surroundings. Many people have thought that because he built himself a hut in Walden forest and often camped there, that he lived the life of a hermit, but this was far from true. Though he never married, he lived very happily in Concord with his mother, two sisters, and a brother, whose untimely death was a great sorrow to him.

It was by the river that the children could almost always find him, for he loved the banks, so overgrown with grasses and slowly wandering through the town. He would guide his boat through its many windings, he would bathe in its waters, skate over its frozen surface, or perhaps gather from its shores or inlets some rare plant whose secrets he wanted to know. He walked, too, long tramps of miles and miles, and it is from him, no doubt, that Louisa learned to love such active exercise. It was twenty miles from Concord to Boston, and many a time the sturdy girl trudged the distance, often we may suppose in Thoreau's company, and then the walk would be delightful, for there was no blade of grass, nor flower, nor tree, that was not known to the gentle woodsman, and the birds, the squirrels, and the insects were his comrades.

From such a teacher the children of Concord

learned the poetry of Nature, and loved the poet who made the flowers speak, and the trees whisper among their tall branches ; who talked with the chipmunks and called the birds about him as he sat silent on the river bank ; who paddled his canoe with Indian skill and coaxed the very fishes up to the surface to feed out of his hand.

Concord was just the place for hearty, simple girls like these ; breathing history at every step, there was something homelike and delightful in its surroundings, and it was always remarkable for the number of happy young people who might be seen in the winter, skating on the hardened snow through the pine woods, and in the summer, bathing or boating in the river, the Concord to which Thoreau gave its Indian name, Muskataquid (the Grass-grown), and which has found its way into many of Miss Alcott's stories. It was the scene of *Amy's* skating disaster in "Little Women," and *Laurie* pitched Camp Laurence upon its smiling shores while "Aunt Jo" had it comfortably near dear old Plumfield for the benefit of "Little Men," and the boys and girls of Harmony Village, where "Jack and Jill" lived, must have used this river on the picnic which winds up the story, Harmony Village, of course, being only another name for Concord. In the Alcotts' day there were masquerades on its placid waters ; gay barges, full of historic characters in costume, glided down stream, and sometimes savages in their war-paint darted from the lily-fringed banks and attacked the gay masqueraders. On the anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, the farmers who began the Revolution

would sometimes return "to masquerade with their fair descendants."

To Louisa this river brought joy untold ; many a long afternoon we can picture her wandering off by herself to enjoy the beauty and the silence of it all. Full of life, and talkative as she was, there was nothing she loved so well as the vast stillness of a great solitude, and if there was a mysterious whispering among the pines in the forest, why, so much the better ; her vivid imagination peopled it at once and she was never lonely.

It was about this time that she came into prominence as a story-teller. The woods and the nature studies gave her material, and the "audience" consisted of little Ellen Emerson, who listened spell-bound to the tales of the flowers. These stories, each quaint and fanciful, were collected several years later and published under the title of "Flower Fables."

There were no special girls' schools in those days ; there was an unusual number of "barn schools," however, and some enterprising young teacher would borrow her neighbour's barn, collect the neighbouring children, secure what boxes and benches she could for seats and desks, and "establish" her school. This was usually in the summer time, and Louisa and her sisters attended one or two. When they grew older, Anna and Louisa held "barn schools" of their own. But there were other and more attractive uses for the barns. Wherever they chanced to be, whether at *Fruitlands* or Concord, the old barn was the scene of many dramatic triumphs. Whatever the trials of everyday life, they

could escape from them into a world of romance in the barn ; there they could revel in luxury and splendour, and Louisa and Anna could act to their hearts' content. This was great sport, and all the Concord young people enjoyed it.

There were the three Emerson children, Ellen, Edith, and Edward ; the three Hawthorne children, Una, Julian, and Rose ; the Alcott girls and many other friends, whose talents, great or small, were called upon at need. Louisa at an early age wrote the most romantic plays ; one of them we have all read in " Little Women," but there are many others which have been collected into book form under the title of " Comic Tragedies," and are extremely interesting, if only to show how the girl's mind was teeming with its hidden fancies, and these plays were produced with wonderful success. The costumes were marvellous ; the two older girls and Mrs. Alcott were clever in contriving something out of nothing. A scrap found its uses ; a red scarf, a long cloak, a big hat with a plume stolen from some departed bonnet, looked positively regal on the barn stage ; scenery was nothing to these artists, who made castles, enchanted forests, caves, or ladies' bowers on demand. Barns, too, were delightful theatres, because of their well-known advantages ; one could make desperate but safe leaps from the beams, and could disappear on short notice into the mangers, and there were " wings " in unexpected corners that could be used with effect.

Some time before the *Fruitlands* experiment, Mrs. Alcott's father, Colonel May, died, and left her

a small amount of money, which she determined to invest in a home. It would at least be a roof over their heads while they were struggling for a living. Mr. Emerson, on being consulted, advised the purchase of a house in Concord, and generously came to her help with a gift of five hundred dollars. With this she bought the place known as *Hillside*, which afterwards became famous as the home of the "Little Women," and later as the residence of the Hawthornes.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was another whose life and writings greatly influenced Louisa. The handsome, shy man was at his best with children, and his stories held the girl spellbound, as they have held many other girls and boys as well as men and women from that day to this. She pored over his books, the more weird and fanciful holding her with keener interest, and love and admiration for the writer took root in her heart, and grew with her growth.

But in spite of the delights of Concord, Louisa was beginning to feel the weight of the family troubles. She saw her father struggling day by day, earning a little here and there by the work of his hands, when his talents as a teacher were running to waste. She saw her mother carrying burdens too heavy for her, and this hurt her even more. A noble purpose took root in that loyal Alcott heart of hers, to mend their broken fortunes and to give to this dear, devoted mother the comforts which had been denied her for so many years.

She was only a girl, and the way was dark before her and full of obstacles. There were so few paths

open to the girls of her day; teaching seemed to be the only thing, and Mr. Emerson's barn was the scene of her first experiment. This did not pay very handsomely and could not support a fair-sized, healthy family. In summer they could get along somehow, but in winter the struggle was hard indeed, until at last a kind friend, passing through Concord, discovered how badly things were going and promised to find employment for Mrs. Alcott if she would come to Boston. So once again the family changed its home. In 1848 they were settled in Boston, where Mrs. Alcott became a visitor to the poor, in the employ of a few benevolent societies, and also kept an intelligence office. This was a valuable experience for both mother and daughters.

Mr. Alcott, whose flow of language was always wonderful, began to hold conversations on his favourite subjects, and drew about him a small circle of thoughtful people. This was congenial work for him, though very small pay, but his employment made them all happy, and the Alcotts were notably a family who gave more than they received. His talks, when they turned on the ancient poets and philosophers, were most interesting and instructive, especially to young people, over whom he had great influence, but Mrs. Cheney, who has so carefully edited Miss Alcott's "Life, Letters, and Journals," tells us "his peculiar theories of temperament and diet never failed to call out discussion and opposition."

"One of my earliest recollections of Louisa," she writes, "is on one of these occasions when he was emphasizing his doctrine that a vegetable diet would

produce unruffled sweetness of temper and disposition. I heard a voice behind me saying to her neighbour : ' I don't know about that. I've never eaten any meat, and I'm awful cross and irritable very often.' "

The Alcotts stood little chance of growing rich or even reasonably comfortable ; they were generous in the fullest sense of the word, often depriving themselves to give help and comfort to others. The well-known story of carrying their breakfast to a starving family is so sweetly described in the second chapter of " Little Women " that it is better read there. Another time they lent their dinner to a neighbour who at short notice had to entertain distinguished guests.

" Another time," writes Miss Alcott, " one snowy Saturday night, when our wood was very low, a poor child came to beg a little, as the baby was sick and the father on a spree, with all his wages. My mother hesitated at first, as we also had a baby ; very cold weather was upon us, and a Sunday to be got through before more wood could be had. My father said : ' Give half our stock and trust in Providence ; the weather will moderate or wood will come.' Mother laughed, and answered in her cheery way : ' Well, their need is greater than ours, and if our half gives out we can go to bed and tell stories.' So a generous half went to the poor neighbour, and a little later in the evening, while the storm still raged and we were about to cover our fire to keep it, a knock came, and a farmer who usually supplied us appeared, saying anxiously : ' I started for Boston with a load of wood, but it drifts so, I want

to go home. Wouldn't you like to have me drop the wood here ; it would accommodate me and you need not hurry about paying for it.' ' Yes,' said Father, and as the man went off he turned to Mother with a look that much impressed us children with his gifts as a seer: ' Didn't I tell you wood would come if the weather did not moderate ? ' Mother's motto was ' Hope and keep busy,' and one of her sayings, ' Cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days it will come back buttered.' "

There is another tale of a tramp who boldly asked Mr. Alcott for a loan of five dollars. Mr. Alcott searched in his pockets, but a ten dollar bill was all he could find. " I haven't what you want," he said in his gentle way, " but take this and pay me when you can." With a grin the man went off, and Mr. Alcott was laughed at by his friends, who discovered that the tramp was a man of bad character, and they felt he would never return. They were mistaken, however ; something in this open-handed generosity must have touched the hardened sinner, for he returned the amount in a short time, much to the surprise of everyone, and Mr. Alcott's satisfaction.

Thus, giving much, receiving little, finding it hard to make ends meet, but happy in one another, despite the short lengths, the Alcott children grew in strength and sweetness. They had learned many serious lessons on their short life journey, but the seeds of patience and endurance had been planted in their loyal young hearts, and already Louisa's hopes and ambitions were eager to try their wings outside of the family nest.

CHAPTER IV

SEEKING A VOCATION

THE four little women paused now in their pilgrimage to take breath and look about them. Two of them were now ready to begin work, the other two were old enough to fill their places in the home life and "help mother" as Anna and Louisa had done; and here it is well for us to pause and look at these girls, about to take their first flight in the world. During their life in Boston things were a little easier; a small though regular income came to them through Mrs. Alcott's work, and they were surrounded by friends and relatives who were kind in many ways, but the two older girls felt the need of adding their small share to the family support.

They missed the delights of Concord; Boston was a good place to work in—not to think in. Among the hills and woods of their beloved little town it was different, but in Boston "the bustle and dirt and change send all lovely images and restful feelings away," Louisa wrote in her journal when she was seventeen, adding farther on, "I see now. what Nature did for me, and my 'romantic tastes,' as people called that love of solitude, and out-of-door life, taught me much."

Upon Anna the changes pressed lightly. Of a calm, sweet, serious nature like her father, she took things as they came, unquestioningly, uncomplainingly, content if they were all together, unhappy at the separations that interrupted their home life. She was never worried about herself or her shortcomings, as Louisa was ; she suited her daily needs to others, and expanded in the moral sunshine which the Alcott family managed always to have about them. No matter what their circumstances, they had high purposes in life, and though Mrs. Alcott might occasionally yield to a quick temper, and Mr. Alcott to hours of depression, and the girls' moods might vent themselves in harmless bickering, the real harmony of their daily life was sound and undisturbed.

Mrs. Alcott had three simple rules for the guidance of her girls : " Rule yourself. Love your neighbour. Do the duty which lies nearest to you."

Anna found them easy to follow ; her disposition reminded one of the fair, placid river beside which they dwelt for so many years : clear, limpid, deep in many places, glancing in the sunshine, full of ripples when a storm passed over it. Usually smiling and smooth of surface, there were swift undercurrents and strong emotions behind the serenity.

Quite different was Louisa ; the undercurrent was very strong, and the turbulent, restless young soul struggled against it. Her hardest lesson was to rule herself. From her earliest childhood she had encountered this difficulty, and all through her early life her impatient spirit waged constant warfare against the poverty which seemed so hard to

conquer. When her mind ran to poetry, as it often did at this period, the result showed itself in rhythmical sermons on cheerfulness, patience, or faith. Here is one which the readers of "Little Women" no doubt remember ; full of faults, it is yet vigorous, atune to the motion of the strong young arms, up and down the washboard ; it is called :

A SONG FROM THE SUDS.

Queen of my tub, I merrily sing,
While the white foam rises high,
And sturdily wash and rinse and wring,
And fasten the clothes to dry ;
Then out in the free fresh air they swing,
Under the sunny sky.

I wish we could wash from our hearts and souls
The stains of the week away,
And let water and air by their magic make
Ourselves as pure as they ;
Then on the earth there would be indeed
A glorious washing day !

Along the path of a useful life
Will heartsease ever bloom ?
The busy mind has no time to think
Of sorrow, or care, or gloom ;
And anxious thoughts may be swept away
As we busily wield a broom.

I am glad a task to me is given,
To labour at day by day ;
For it brings me health, and strength, and hope,
And I cheerfully learn to say,
" Head, you may think ; Heart, you may feel ;
But Hand, you shall work away."

Head and heart and hand, they were engines of

energy to this impetuous young person ; the head and the heart would have galloped away with her, had not a wise mother's foresight trained the hands to the needs of every day. Louisa at seventeen could wash and iron, cook and scrub, sweep and dust, darn and mend, " turn " and sew. There was plenty of " turning " to do, no doubt, for a really new dress was a rare occurrence among the Alcott girls. Kind relatives and friends were constantly supplying them with good things which their clever fingers fashioned into very respectable additions to their wardrobes, and that interesting chapter in " An Old-Fashioned Girl," where *Polly* presides at the making over of *Fan's* last year's gowns, is doubly interesting because so thoroughly true to life. *Polly* tells the story of a little checked silk which was sent to her mother in a lot of other discarded finery ; this was carefully washed to look as good as new, and after much fussing and planning, a complete gown was cut out, coming short only by half of one sleeve ; the family was in despair, but at last, by clever matching and patching, the remaining scraps, ten in all, were neatly put together into the under half of the sleeve, and no one was the wiser.

They must have had funny bundles sent to them by friends who had not learned the art of giving wisely, and had it not been that the calls of the drama claimed the finery that fell to their portion, the " shabby silk bonnets and dirty flounced gowns " would have gone the way of all such rubbish. The following nonsense verse must have relieved Louisa's mind on one of these occasions :

To poor country folks,
Who haven't any clothes,
Rich folks to relieve them,
Send old lace gowns and satin bows.

Their uncle, the Rev. Samuel J. May, lived in Boston and was very kind to his sister's family. The girls loved him, for he resembled their mother in many ways. He was a brave, simple, single-hearted gentleman, whose word was a power among the best people in the city, and he was courageous enough to preach anti-slavery from his pulpit at a time when the mere whisper of such a thing was considered treason. It is little wonder that Louisa and her sisters, brought up under the shadow of the coming struggle, should become sturdy abolitionists in those Boston days. The men and women with whom they were thrown, whom they were taught to revere and to follow as guides, were staunch advocates of freedom for the slave.

There was Mr. Alcott himself, who read Socrates and Plato and preached the philosophy of freedom ; and Emerson, who broke the fetters of the thinking world and preached practical freedom for everyone of high or low degree ; and Thoreau, the woodsman, whose love of freedom drove him to the forests and the streams, preached of it in his eloquent way when thoughtful people met to protest against the growing evil of the times ; and Theodore Parker, the famous Unitarian minister, whose grandfather, Captain John Parker, commanded the handful of men who faced the British regulars on Lexington Green when they were ordered to lay down their arms and disperse.

Theodore Parker exerted a great influence on Louisa; his cheerful religion preached to her better than a dozen sermons. He always drew around him young men and women who needed the sort of help which he could give, and he gave it freely. There was Lydia Maria Child, one of the best-known writers of her day, a woman of powerful mind who gave herself heart and soul to the cause. There were Ellery Channing, William Garrison, and Wendell Phillips, who not only came into the lives of the young Alcotts and visited in their home, but kindled their eager minds by their eloquence in public speaking.

Of the two younger Alcott girls there is little to say at this period. Beth or Betty or Lizzie or Bess, as she was variously called by the different members of her family, at fourteen, was a sweet retiring girl, very much as Miss Alcott describes her in "Little Women."

"There are many Beths in the world, shy and quiet, sitting in corners till needed, and living for others so cheerfully that no one sees the sacrifices till the little cricket on the hearth stops chirping, and the sweet sunshiny presence vanishes, leaving silence and shadow behind." This is the tribute Miss Alcott paid this dear sister in the early pages of "Little Women," ten years after her death. She was not only fond of music, but she showed great talent for the piano, and many said had she lived, her gift would have soared above the gifts of her sisters.

May's artistic efforts began at babyhood; everything that came within her reach from the time she was old enough to hold a pencil was either sketched

or copied. She was decided in her taste and good to look upon, a golden-haired child with blue eyes, the marring feature being a rather flat nose, which caused her much sorrow, and we can fancy the many painful attempts she made to squeeze it into proper shape with the help of a clothes-peg.

The first two summers of their stay in Boston were spent in their uncle's roomy house, with many comforts about them, which they enjoyed, and yet it is here that Louisa had some moments of mournful reflection. "Seventeen years have I lived," she writes in her journal, "and yet so little do I know, and so much remains to be done before I begin to be what I desire—a truly good and useful woman. In looking over our journals, father says, 'Anna's is about other people; Louisa's about herself!' That is true, for I don't *talk* about myself; yet must always think of the wilful, moody girl I try to manage, and in my journal I write of her to see how she gets on. Anna is so good, she need not take care of herself, and can enjoy other people."

Louisa was evidently aware of her good looks, for she says, "If I look in my glass, I try to keep down vanity about my long hair, my well-shaped head, and my good nose."

But these were not her only beauties; she was tall and graceful as a deer, the hair she speaks of was a beautiful glossy chestnut mane, her complexion was clear and full of colour, and her blue eyes were deep-set and most expressive. "My quick tongue is always getting me into trouble," she goes on, "and my moodiness makes it hard to be cheerful, when I think how poor we are, how much worry

it is to live, and how many things I long to do—I never can. So every day is a battle, and I'm so tired I don't want to live, only it's cowardly to die till you have done something." How many a girl with life and health and energy has felt this strange depression with much less reason behind it, for poor Louisa was passing through a hard experience at this time.

In a mad fit of charity, the Alcotts opened their gates to some poor immigrants who camped in their garden for a day. There was smallpox raging among them, and the whole Alcott family caught the disease. They had a sorry time of it, especially as they had no doctor, and while the girls took it lightly, Mr. and Mrs. Alcott were very ill; everybody kept away from them, and it was no wonder that poor Louisa felt low in her mind.

Anna went away for a change after her illness, leaving a school of twenty in Louisa's charge, a great responsibility for a girl of seventeen, but it was a fine experience, and though as usual she missed Anna and shed many tears over her absence, she managed to work her way straight into the hearts of her children; she told them fascinating stories, which made the lessons pleasanter and showed at the same time her wonderful power of interesting them. Indeed, she succeeded so well with her pupils that she began to think that teaching would be her chosen work; but in this she was mistaken; she was to have many experiences before she found her niche.

Though encouraged about her school, she found it hard work even when Anna came back to help

her. "I get very little time to write or think," she says in her journal, "for my working days have begun, and when school is over Anna wants me, so I have no quiet. A little solitude is good for me. In the quiet I see my faults and try to mend them, but deary me, I don't get on at all!"

A year later her ambition pointed in another direction. Always interested in dramatic things, she launched out into the writing of most wonderful plays, in which Anna gave much assistance. Of course they were all written in the loftiest, most high-flown language, with stilted sentiments, tales of chivalry, of impossible adventures, all dealing with lords and ladies, fairies and spirits of good and evil; no commonplace hero or heroine blots the pages, the triumph of virtue over vice is the invariable climax. These plays, many of which have been preserved, are all extremely girlish, just what one would imagine from the pen of a girl of seventeen, full of a girl's dreams and fancies, glowing with romance, quite apart from the everyday life about her. Full of trap-doors and secret, haunted chambers were her castles, deep and dark and mouldy were her dungeons; the dismal clank of chains announced her captives, her ladies were ethereal in their loveliness, her knights were always superb specimens of manhood, her villains dastardly to the heart's core. There were mysteries and concealments and absurd situations, but the dialogue was clever and the story was put together in a way to delight a youthful audience, for they were constantly acting dramas in which Louisa and Anna took the principal parts. In the acting they

were ably assisted by some intimate friends who had remarkable talent, and as Mrs. Alcott encouraged the private theatricals, they made a success in their small way. This inspired the Alcott girls to higher ambitions—they were wild to go on the stage.

"Anna wants to be an actress, and so do I," writes Louisa. "We could make plenty of money perhaps, and it is a very gay life. Mother says we are too young and must wait."

A sagacious lady was Mrs. Alcott, who knew her young daughters better than they knew themselves. Louisa liked tragic plays and determined to be as great as Mrs. Siddons; there was no halfway about Louisa, and she was really talented. One of her relatives, Dr. Windship, of Roxbury, took a great interest in her dramatic work and offered one of her plays, "The Rival Prima Donnas," to Mr. Barry, of the Boston Theatre. He liked it very much and determined to put it on the stage, Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Wood consenting to take the principal characters. There was some hitch in the arrangements and it was never produced in public, but after this Louisa had a free pass to the theatre, which she enjoyed immensely.

Great as was her desire to go on the stage, she was sensible enough to listen to her mother's wise counsel and keep from the dangers and temptations of such a life. Clever as she was, she had yet to learn that cleverness alone does not make a great actress, and she was not a girl to be satisfied with any but the first rank.

Miss Alcott herself, in her novel, "Work," which is based chiefly on her own experiences, says of

Christie Devon, the heroine: "She had no talent except that which may be developed in any girl possessing the lively fancy, sympathetic nature, and ambitious spirit which make some girls naturally dramatic. This was to be only one of many experiences which were to show her her own weakness and strength, and through effort, pain, and disappointment, to fit her to play a nobler part on a wider stage."

This was written long after Louisa's passion for the stage had died a natural death. She acted many times privately, and often publicly for charity, and always with a certain charm and delicacy. She gave parts of Dickens extremely well, and read Shakespeare pleasingly. She was in her element with character sketches and imitations, but the divine fire she certainly had not, else she never would have given up her dreams, nor would her mother have counselled her to do so.

Mrs. Alcott was ever eager for her children's advancement, and if on their life journey they could see a short cut to prosperity, hers was the hand to send them on their way; all their youthful schemes and plans received encouragement, and though many of their Puritan friends might have viewed the stage with disfavour, Mrs. Alcott had no such prejudice. Indeed, her own work in a broad field among the poor gave her foresight and wisdom above the average woman of her time.

The keeping of an intelligence office in those days did not mean what it does now; the best ladies in the land were employed in this work, and the poor women who applied for employment were in many instances quite as good. Honest labour was never

degrading to these proud Alcotts, and the secret of Louisa's later success was that in those early years she hesitated at nothing which could aid in the support of the family.

They were living at this time in a small house on High Street. Anna and Louisa taught, Lizzie kept house, May went to school, and Mr. Alcott wrote and talked when he could get classes or "conversations." His influence was great, especially among young people, but somehow while they were willing to listen to words of wisdom, they were not *always* so willing to pay for them. The Alcott home, poor though it was, was full of love, and a shelter for the homeless and loveless who knocked at their doors, for these great-hearted people had an endless supply of sympathy for all in need.

In 1852, her first story came out, for which she received the sum of five dollars. It was written in Concord when she was sixteen, and in her own opinion it was great trash ; she read it to her sisters, who praised it, not knowing the author ; and when she proudly announced the name, there was true rejoicing.

They were constantly having little jubilees ; something was always " turning up," and the disappointments were seldom spoken of. Occasionally a moan was made when experience proved too hard a teacher, and one of these experiences Louisa put into a story called " How I went out to Service."

A gentleman came to Mrs. Alcott's intelligence office in search of a companion for his father and sister. Only light work was to be required of her, and as Mrs. Alcott could think of no one to fill the

position, Louisa suggested herself, and went off happily to her new work, secure in the belief that she would receive all kindness and respect; but her two months' trial changed her opinion, and she began to understand, from the unkindness with which she, a girl of high spirit and intelligence, was treated, why it was that many preferred working in factories or shops rather than be subjected to what she suffered.

Another experience, not quite so painful, was yet pathetic enough in a whimsical way. In January, 1853, Mr. Alcott started for the West to try his luck with lecturing; he went off full of hope, leaving Mrs. Alcott with several boarders, Anna teaching at Syracuse, and Louisa with a home school of ten pupils. This was his opportunity, and the whole family eagerly awaited the result. The girls built many castles; at last "Father" would be appreciated, and after the manner of young, hopeful spirits, they actually began to bank on the lecture money. In February he returned, arriving late at night, and rousing the family by a sudden peal of the bell. Up they all rose from their beds, five capped and nightgowned figures. Mrs. Alcott led the way and ecstatically crying, "My husband!" flung herself into the arms of the returned wanderer, while the four girls embraced whatever portion of the beloved form they could get hold of. Then he was borne off and fed and warmed and cuddled, before a word was said about the success of the lecture tour. He talked a good deal, but only about the pleasant things, until asked suddenly:

"Well, what did they pay you?"

With a pathetic smile he opened his pocketbook and took out one dollar.

"Only that," he answered. "My overcoat was stolen and I had to buy a shawl. Many promises were not kept and travelling is costly, but," he added, with a serenity which neither time nor misfortune could shatter, "I have opened the way and another year shall do better."

"I shall never forget," writes Louisa, "how beautifully Mother answered him, though the dear, hopeful soul had built so much on his success; but with a beaming face she kissed him, saying: 'I call that doing *very well*; since you are safely home, dear, we won't ask anything more.' Anna and I choked down our tears and took a little lesson in real love, which we never forgot, nor the look that the tired man and tender woman gave one another. It was half tragic and comic, for Father was very dirty and sleepy, and Mother in a big nightcap and funny old jacket."

And so with "ups and downs," plenty of frolicking, an overflow of hard times, a glimpse of men and women that even the beloved haunts of Concord could never have given her, Louisa passed those seven years of her life that saw the girl grow into a capable young woman, sturdy of hand and heart, ready to do and dare for those she loved, full of the dreams and ambitions of hopeful youth. A typical American maiden of those ante-bellum days, with the strong New England spirit of intolerance for slavery, a desire to do right in the face of all obstacles, a determination to win from life, by her own effort, the fortune which could not come to her in any other way.

CHAPTER V

AFLOAT AS AN AUTHOR

THE proudest moment of Louisa's life was the day which saw the publication of "Flower Fables." The book breathed of the woods and the wild things that grew there, for she had learned the flower secrets from her old friend Thoreau, and these she told to the little Emersons and Channings, as they sat in the Concord woods, with the asters and the golden-rod nodding to them like friendly comrades.

One may imagine the scene—the cool, green woodland stretch, the giant trees with the sunshine filtering through, making gold ripples in the chestnut hair of the tall girl, surrounded by her smaller companions. At first it was only Ellen Emerson, but as the tales grew in interest, and wood-sprites, water-sprites and fairy queens danced in the sylvan glade, her audience increased and listened breathlessly to the stories which preached of love and joy and youth and happiness, in the language of the flowers and birds.

The true poetry of the girl's nature came to the surface in these woodland hours. One story, "The Fairy Spring," must have been about her sister May, for the little heroine is described as "a pretty child, with hair like sunshine, eyes blue as the sky,

cheeks like the wild roses nodding to her on either side of the way, and a voice as sweet as the babbling brook she loved to sing with. May was never happier than when alone in the woods, and every morning with her cup and a little roll of bread in her basket, she wandered away to some of her favourite nooks to feast on berries, play with the flowers, talk to the birds, and make friends with all the harmless wood creatures, who soon knew and welcomed her."

There in the woods she listened to the brook and for the first time understood what it sang as it flowed along.

I am calling, I am calling,
As I ripple, run and sing.
Come up higher, come up higher,
Come and find the fairy spring.
Who will listen, who will listen
To the wonders I can tell
Of a palace built of sunshine,
Where the sweetest spirits dwell ?
Singing winds and magic waters,
Golden shadows, silver rain,
Spells that make the sad heart happy,
Sleep that cures the deepest pain.
Cheeks that bloom like summer roses,
Smiling lips and hours that shine,
Come to those who climb the mountain,
Find and taste the fairy wine.
I am calling, I am calling,
As I ripple, run and sing ;
Who will listen, who will listen,
To the story of the Spring ?

Who could resist the rhythm of these simple lines ? Surely not the Concord children for whom the woods awoke in those happy days. Small wonder, then, that Louisa loved the book which

breathed of the trees and the flowers, and sent her back to the pleasant memories of her childhood.

"Flower Fables" was her Christmas gift to her mother; she sent it with the following note:

"December 25, 1854.

"DEAR MOTHER:

"Into your Christmas stocking I have put my 'first-born,' knowing that you will accept it with all its faults (for grandmothers are always kind), and look upon it merely as an earnest of what I may yet do; for with so much to cheer me on, I hope to pass in time from fairies and fables to men and realities. Whatever beauty or poetry is to be found in my little book is owing to your interest in, and encouragement of, all my efforts from the first to the last, and if ever I do anything to be proud of, my greatest happiness will be that I can thank you for that, as I may do for all the good there is in me, and I shall be content to write if it gives you pleasure.

"Jo is fussing about,
My lamp is going out.

"To dear mother, with many kind wishes for a Happy New Year and Merry Christmas.

"I am ever your loving daughter,

"Louy."

Every blade of grass, every woodland flower, the trees, the ferns, the very stones, assumed personalities. No one who could so people her everyday world with fairies could fail to believe in them, and the charm about Louisa's "Flower Fables" is that one can see childlike belief creeping out in



JO AND MEG.

COPIES OF EARLY DAGUERREOTYPES.

every story. Here is the song of the Fairy Star, who made the Rose bloom in spite of the grim old Frost King :

Sleep, little seed,
Deep in your bed,
While winter snow
Lies overhead.
Wake, little sprout,
And drink the rain,
Till sunshine calls
You to rise again.
Strike deep, young root,
In the earth below,
Unfold pale leaves,
Begin to grow.
Baby Bud, dance
In the warm sun ;
Bloom, sweet rose,
Life has begun.

Here she has told the story of the birth of the flowers as Emerson would have told it, with a swinging measure of words, if not in perfect rhythm. Perhaps the tale of Queen Aster is best known.

It seems that in the meadow the government was very much upset. The Goldenrods had ruled for a great many years and had become very proud and haughty. Now the roadside Asters were equally proud, and of higher descent, as they came from the stars and were a much larger tribe than the Goldenrods, so there was a revolution in the meadow.

" In the middle of this meadow stood a beautiful maple, and at its foot lay a large rock overgrown by a wild grapevine. All kinds of flowers sprung up here, and this autumn a tall spray of goldenrod and a lovely violet aster grew almost side by side, with only a screen of ferns between them. This

was called the palace, and seeing their cousin there made the asters feel that their turn had come, and many of the other flowers agreed with them that a change of rulers ought to be made for the good of the kingdom.

"After much excitement, Violet Aster was chosen Queen and made such a wise and gentle ruler that even the defeated Prince Goldenrod looked on in admiration, which soon changed to love. He sang love songs to her under the stars, and as she leaned toward him to listen, he saw the love-light in her eyes and began his wooing.

"At his ardent words the screen fell away from between them, the leaves that hid Violet's golden heart opened wide and let him see how glad she was as she bent her stately head and answered, softly :

" 'There is room upon the throne for two ; share it with me as King, and let us rule together ; for it is lonely without love, and each needs the other.' . . . The maple showered the rosy leaves over them, and the old Rock waved his crown of vine leaves as he said :

" 'This is as it should be ; love and strength going hand in hand, and justice making the earth glad.' "

When we reflect that into these love stories of the flowers Louisa poured all the romance in her girlish heart, we wonder why love never played a bigger part in her own life. Her capacity for loving was very large, perhaps too large to tie itself to the all-absorbing love of marriage. She was so attractive that no doubt she had many offers, though

only one is recorded. She was absorbed in the love of her home, the love of her country, the love of her work—three great passions which filled her life and made her proud to show the world that marriage, beautiful as it is, is not the only goal in the life of a busy, happy girl. No doubt, being a true woman, had a great love come to her, she would have obeyed its call, but it never did, and so through the “ Flower Fables ” and through every book which has appealed to her thousands of readers, young and old, she has scattered her little romances with the deft hand of one who knows and feels. She often laughingly said in later days that circumstances had made of her a sort of universal relative—wife, mother, husband, brother, sister, son and daughter all in one.

The publication of “ Flower Fables ” was paid for by a friend—Miss Wealthy Stevens. The edition of sixteen hundred sold very well, though Louisa realized only thirty-two dollars on the whole.

“ A pleasing contrast,” she adds many years after, “ to the receipts of *six months only* in 1886, being eight thousand dollars for the sale of books and no new one ; but I was prouder over the thirty-two dollars than the eight thousand.” Prouder, perhaps—but not *quite* so comfortable.

If the publication of “ Flower Fables ” did nothing more, at least it pointed out the way ; it turned Louisa’s heart and mind toward the goal that her eyes could not as yet see clearly. There was so much to do, so many doubts to drive away, so many daily needs to satisfy, that she was often compelled to turn aside from the path that was most alluring. Teaching and sewing she regarded as stand-bys,

and often when her active brain was "simmering," as she called it, she was tied to the one or the other. In those days of no sewing machines, Louisa had ample time while running up a seam or doing endless hemming to think out the many tales which afterwards delighted the world, and from this time on the demand for her stories increased, and the fact that she could in that way bring in the much-needed money for the family support, spurred her to do her best.

About this time the desire for solitude was strong upon her, so she took to writing in the garret, which was the scene of much meditation and innocent pleasure. Here she loved to bring her favourite book and a pile of apples to enjoy while she read. When stories and plots absorbed her mind there was nothing more delightful than to mount up away from the world, and with her papers scattered all about her and pens and ink at her command, fall to work on the stories which were becoming more popular every day. The garret must have been the famous retreat in "Little Women," whither *Jo* retired to read and cry over the "Heir of Redcliffe," when *Meg* told her about the invitation to the Gardiners' party, a retreat which was shared by a pet rat of literary tastes.

Later on, when the fever for short stories and small checks seized her, *Jo* made herself a scribbling costume with a mob cap, no doubt a reproduction of Louisa's own.

"Every few weeks she would shut herself up in her room, put on her scribbling suit and 'fall into a vortex,' as she expressed it."

Louisa decided not to "waste even ink on poems and fancies," so the stories grew in number, and with the greater demand came a better price. At one time, with forty dollars which she had earned, she fitted out the whole family, her own wardrobe being made up of articles from the cousins and friends.

Mr. Alcott was most anxious to go to England again, this time on a lecture tour, but his family opposed such a venture. However, he went to Concord to consult with Mr. Emerson, and as there is no further mention made of the project, it is evident that the wise philosopher dissuaded him. But the whole family grew weary of Boston, they felt stifled in the small city houses and the city atmosphere. As the summer of 1855 approached, a peculiar restlessness took possession of them; it seemed impossible to make any definite plans.

"We shall probably stay here," writes Louisa, "and Anna and I go into the country as governesses. It's a queer way to live, but dramatic, and I rather like it; for we never know what is to come next." Later she adds: "Cousin L. W. asks me to pass the summer at Walpole with her. If I can get no teaching I shall go, for I long for the hills and can write my fairy tales there."

These were to go into another Christmas book she was planning; she called it "Christmas Elves," and her sister May illustrated it. Louisa considered it much better than "Flower Fables."

She wrote a burlesque lecture on "Woman and her Position; by Oronthy Bluggage," and delivered it one evening at the house of a friend. It was

brimming over with fun, and Louisa was in her element, for she carried her audience with her and they had a lively time of it. She was asked to give it again for money; indeed, there was always some financial possibility looming up for this clever and original young woman. She was very modest about herself and her achievements, though she never underrated her powers. When her book appeared, she said in her journal:

"My book came out, and people began to think that topsey-turvy Louisa would amount to something after all, since she could do so well as housemaid, teacher, seamstress, and story-teller. Perhaps she may."

She went to Walpole, New Hampshire, in June. It was a lovely spot high up among the hills, and the wild freedom of the place delighted her. She ran and skipped like a child in the open, she loved to burrow in the woods and wander through the splendid ravines. She helped her cousin to work in the garden, and the touch of the fresh earth and the green leaves gave her much pleasure. Early rising came naturally to her in this keen country air.

"Up at five," she writes, "and had a lovely run in the ravine, seeing the woods wake. Planned a little tale which ought to be fresh and true, as it came at that hour and place—'King Goldenrod.' Have lively days—writing in A.M., driving in P.M., and fun in eve. My visit is doing me much good."

No one was more dependent on good wholesome fun than Louisa, herself, often the centre of it all. She was always in demand among her relatives and

friends, and was a never-failing source of entertainment wherever she went.

She was so delighted with Walpole that her family caught her enthusiasm, and decided for the present to come and live there ; it never took the Alcotts long to plan and decide things ; they were not cumbered with an overload of the world's goods, and could move from place to place with very little trouble or expense. In this instance, they were lucky enough to secure the house of a friend, rent free, and were glad of the rest from strenuous work. Mr. Alcott had his garden, and the younger girls all the light and air and freedom that they missed so sadly in the city. Anna and Louisa were in their element.

" Busy and happy times," Louisa tells us ; " plays, picnics, pleasant people and good neighbours. Fanny Kemble came up, Mrs. Kirtland and others, and Dr. Bellows is the gayest of the gay. We acted the ' Jacobite,' ' Rivals,' and ' Bonnycastle,' to an audience of a hundred, and were noticed in the Boston papers. . . . Anna was the star, her acting being really very fine. I did *Mrs. Malaprop*, *Widow Pottle*, and the old ladies."

But the summer passed all too quickly. Louisa's fairy stories were ready in September. This she modestly believed would give her ample time to present them for Christmas publication. In the meanwhile Anna received an offer from Dr. Wilbur, of Syracuse, to teach at the great idiot asylum. The gentle, beauty-loving girl shrank from accepting the position. Affliction of any kind tried her spirit, but duty conquered and she determined to go.

She left Walpole in October, and in November Louisa, too, set forth, to seek *her* fortune. Armed with a small trunk, twenty dollars, earned by stories in the *Gazette*, and her manuscripts, she received her mother's blessing and turned her face toward Boston one rainy, hopeless-looking day. Here her enthusiasm received its first shower-bath ; her book was, of course, too late for holiday publication, so, with Heaven knows how many secret tears of disappointment, it was laid away, while Louisa bravely trudged about, hunting for employment—"teaching, sewing, or any housework. Won't go home to sit idle, while I have a head and a pair of hands."

It was this indomitable spirit that proved her worth ; the Alcotts all had it in a greater or less degree, but there was fighting stuff in Louisa and she would not be "downed." She had much to fight against ; in spite of literary ability and powerful friends, the majority of busy people still looked askance at an Alcott who presumed to make any advance toward prosperity, and the daughter of the unworldly philosopher, who preferred to be poor all his life rather than sacrifice his ideals, had small chance save on her own merit.

Louisa was only twenty-three when she set out alone for Boston, a mere girl still in many ways, but a life of struggle had given her a certain poise, a simple, direct way of facing things, which was one of the lessons she had learned from Emerson. Whatever discouragement she may have felt, she must have shown a bold, cheerful front to her own little world, for while she was wondering how she could secure comfortable board during the winter

with twenty dollars in her pocket and no visible means of support, her cousins, the Sewalls, came to her rescue, and offered her a home. This she accepted most gratefully, paying for her board by sewing, and, in her spare time, writing stories, reviewing books, and trying to cheer Anna and the home people with long, gossipy letters. The family at Walpole were feeling the severe winter, and poor Anna was heartsick over her work among the idiots.

In December, she heard Thackeray lecture, but her pleasures just then were swallowed up in anxiety for the home people. She sent them a box for Christmas, and in a letter to Anna she describes some of the gifts in her humorous way.

“Boston, December 27th.

“DEAREST NAN :

“I was so glad to hear from you, and hear that all were well. I am grubbing away as usual and trying to get money enough to buy mother a nice warm shawl. I have eleven dollars, all my own earning. . . . I got a crimson ribbon for a bonnet for May. I took my straw and fixed it nicely with some little duds I had. Her old one has haunted me all winter and I want her to look neat ; she is so graceful and pretty, and loves beauty so much, it is hard for her to be poor and wear other people’s ugly things. You and I have learned not to mind *much* ; but when I think of her I long to dash out and buy the finest hat the limited sum of ten dollars can procure. She says so sweetly in one of her letters : ‘It is hard sometimes to see other people have so many nice things and I so

few ; but I try not to be envious, but contented with my poor clothes and cheerful about it.'

" I hope the little dear will like the bonnet, and the frills I made her, and some bows I fixed over from some bright ribbons L. W. threw away. I get half my rarities from her rag-bag, and she doesn't know her old rags when fixed over. . . .

" For our good little Betty, who is wearing all the old gowns we left, I shall soon be able to buy a new one and send it, with my blessing, to the cheerful saint. She writes me the funniest notes and tries to keep the old folks warm, and make the lonely house in the snowbanks cheerful and bright.

" To Father I shall send new neckties and some paper ; then he will be happy, and can keep on with the beloved diaries, though the heavens fall.

" Don't laugh at my plans, I'll carry them out if I go to service to do it. Seeing so much money flying about, I long to honestly get a little and make my dear family more comfortable. I feel weak-minded when I think of all they need and the little I can do.

" Now about you : Keep the money you have earned by so many tears and sacrifices, and clothe yourself, for it makes me mad to know that my good little lass is going round in shabby things and being looked down upon by people who are not worthy to touch her patched shoes or the hem of her ragged old gowns."

Of herself she writes : " My mite won't come amiss and if tears can add to its value, I've shed my quart—first, over the book not coming out, for that was a sad blow, and I waited so long, it was dreadful

when my castle in the air came tumbling about my ears. Pride made me laugh in public, but I wailed in private, and no one knew it. The folks at home think I rather enjoyed it, for I wrote a jolly letter. But my visit was spoiled, and now I'm digging away for dear life, that I may not have come entirely in vain."

It was in letters such as this that the true nature of the girl shone forth. Being a young woman of moods, Louisa relieved her depression at this time by writing a farce, which was taken by Mr. J. M. Field, to be brought out in Mobile, but unfortunately he died before it made its bow to the public. Fate seemed always to lay a finger on her dramatic productions, but the "story" form of literature was more successful. Even her poems found a market; one on Dickens' "Little Nell" was published in the *Courier*, and after hearing Curtis lecture on Dickens, she wrote another on "Little Paul." She also received ten dollars for "Bertha," a story which was well advertised, and another ten dollars for "Genevieve," which went remarkably well. She planned a summer book called "Beach Bubbles," which was published story by story instead of in book form. Her brain was seething with plots and fancies, while her fingers were tied to her needle, for sewing piled upon her and she was too poor to refuse the work. One job of a dozen pillow-cases, a dozen sheets, six fine cambric neckties, and two dozen handkerchiefs, at which she worked all night, paid her only four dollars. Even the small sum of five dollars for a story would have been more profitable and less wearing.

Anna came home from Syracuse about this time sick and worn out from overwork. She stopped in Boston, where she and Louisa spent some happy days together, visiting about.

Writing in her journal, June, 1856, she says :

“ Home to find dear Betty very ill with scarlet fever, caught from some poor children mother nursed when they fell sick, living over a cellar where pigs had been kept. The landlord (a deacon) would not clean the place until Mother threatened to sue him for allowing a nuisance. Too late to save two of the poor babies or Lizzie and May from the fever.”

From this illness Lizzie never recovered ; the fever left its wasting marks upon her. They had an anxious time, for it came in its worst form, and the poor girl tossed in delirium, while they hung about her, fearful that each paroxysm would be her last. To those who have read “ Little Women,” the “ dark days,” when *Beth* had the fever, carried their full weight of woe. The blessed change, when the fever broke at last, must have been vividly felt by the little band watching each laboured breath that brought their dear one back to them, a shadow of her bright happy self, to beam among them for a short while longer.

Louisa found her hands full with nursing and housework, but her brave heart never failed her, and she managed to write a story a month during the summer. These stories are probably the “ rubbish ” she speaks of in “ Little Women ” when she says : “ ‘ The Duke’s Daughter ’ paid the butcher’s bill, ‘ A Phantom Hand ’ put down a new

carpet, and ' The Curse of the Coventrys ' proved the blessing of the Marches in the way of groceries and gowns."

" Little notice was taken of her stories, but they found a market, and, encouraged by this fact, she resolved to make a bold stroke for fame and fortune."

This was Louisa to the life ; her stories may have been " rubbish," and, like her dramas, they may have been full of impossible situations, but there was a high moral tone to even the faultiest, and while in later years she may have laughed over the highly coloured romances, she never had cause to blush for a single thought contained in them. Their service rendered, the bills paid, " Genevieve," " Bertha," and the others died natural deaths, and the young author looked beyond, into a more wholesome world of literature.

CHAPTER VI

"LITTLE WOMEN" GROWN UP

THE recovery of the invalid was very slow, but by the following October, Louisa, feeling that she could once more be spared, made her plans to go to Boston for the winter. Walpole was pleasant enough in summer, with its visitors, its walks and its drives ; but when the cold weather came it was only a snow-bank where people clung to their firesides in the vain endeavour to shut out the sound of the sharp winds that howled round the lonely little place. There was nothing an active, energetic girl could do there except to fold her hands and curb her impatience ; it was not in Louisa's nature to do either. She says of herself :

" I was born with a boy's spirit under my bib and tucker. *I can't wait* when I *can work* ; so I took my little talent in my hand and forced the world again, braver than before, and wiser for my failures. . . . I don't often pray in words, but when I set out that day with all my worldly goods in the little old trunk, my own earnings (twenty-five dollars) in my pocket, and much hope and resolution in my soul, my heart was very full, and I said to the Lord, ' Help us all, and keep us for one another,' as I never said it before, while I looked back at the dear faces watching me, so full of love and faith and hope."

It took a very brave girl to shoulder her burden just now, worn out with a summer of anxiety, but Louisa's spirits were fortunately elastic, and once in Boston, she shook her gauntlet in Dame Fortune's face and challenged the lady to mortal combat.

Her good friend, Mrs. David Reed, who kept a well-known boarding-house on Chauncey Street, offered her an attic room at three dollars a week with fire and board, an unusual price, but independent Louisa sewed for her besides. It was a cozy, sunny little room, with a stove and a nice table where she could sit and write whenever she wished, and she began to hope great things from the quiet hours of uninterrupted work she would enjoy.

The monthly story at ten dollars was still in demand, and there was plenty of sewing to keep her afloat. She also had some hope that her play, "The Rival Prima Donnas," might come out at last, and she calculated on being able to support herself and help the family besides. She was anxious also to get some hours' work as governess, but in this she was disappointed at first, though it came after.

She began at this time to take a great interest in Theodore Parker. He was a man of earnest purpose and wide influence. He was not the usual type of minister, and his strong sermons were not always taken from a Bible text, but lessons were drawn from the everyday life of the working men and women among whom she lived. Thoughtful young people adored him, Louisa among the rest ; and many a delightful Sunday evening was passed in his hospitable home. For hither came the best in the land, and the somewhat shy and unfortunately tall young

woman, who could not conveniently tuck herself out of view, would slip into a corner and watch and enjoy a sight of these great beings. She describes him in "Work," in the character of *Mr. Power*, as "A sturdy man of fifty, with a keen, brave face, penetrating eyes, and mouth a little grim; but a voice so resonant and sweet, it reminded one of silver trumpets, and stirred and won the hearer with irresistible power. Rough gray hair and all the features rather rugged, as if the Great Sculptor had blocked out a grand statue and left the man's own soul to finish it."

It was at his house she met Charles Sumner, Julia Ward Howe, Phillips, Garrison, Beecher, and other "great ones," and as she sat apart and listened to these eloquent talkers, whose pet theme was abolition, her enthusiastic nature warmed at the fire, and freedom for the slave was thereafter the war-cry of Louisa Alcott. She writes to her father describing these Sunday evenings :

"All talk, and I sit in a corner listening and wishing a certain placid, gray-haired gentleman was there talking, too. Mrs. Parker calls on me, reads my stories, and is very good to me. Theodore asks Louisa 'how her worthy parents do,' and is otherwise very friendly to the large bashful girl who adorns his parlour steadily."

It was a very happy and very busy winter, full of stirring events, social gaiety, fine lectures, theatre and opera treats, plenty of sewing and much writing. On November 3, 1856, she writes in her journal :

"Wrote all the morning. In the P.M. went to see the Sumner reception, as he comes home after the

Brooks affair. I saw him pass up Beacon Street, pale and feeble, but smiling and bowing. I rushed to Hancock Street, and was in time to see him bring his proud old mother to the window, when the crowd gave three cheers for her. I cheered, too, and was very much excited. Mr. Parker met him somewhere before the ceremony began, and the above P. cheered like a boy ; and Sumner laughed and nodded as his friend pranced and shouted, bareheaded and beaming."

Charles Sumner was at that time the idol of Boston ; he was a brilliant man and a fine speaker. He was elected United States Senator from Massachusetts, to succeed Daniel Webster, and it is a remarkable coincidence that Henry Clay left the Senate on the day Sumner entered it. He was bitterly opposed to slavery, and always championed the cause of the weak against the strong. He was really more of a scholar than a politician, but his country needed him and there was no hesitation when this call came :

Forego thy dreams of lettered ease ;
Lay thou the scholar's promise by :
The rights of man are more than these.
He heard and answered, " Here am I."

His plain speaking made an enemy of Preston Smith Brooks, who attacked him in the Senate with a bludgeon, and it was when recovering from his wounds that Boston rang with his welcome home.

If Louisa had been a man, there is no telling what part she would have taken in the burning questions of the day, but her petticoats kept her shy, and the time had not yet arrived when women could speak

their minds ; so she could only stand on street corners and cheer, and write, write, write, in her sunny attic.

Again she says : " My kind cousin L. W. got tickets for a course of lectures on ' Italian Literature,' and sent me a new cloak with other needful and pretty things such as girls love to have. I shall never forget how kind she has always been to me."

November 5th was a " red-letter " day, for though her play was not yet forthcoming, Mr. Barry gave her a pass to the theatre, and in the evening she saw La Grange as *Norma*, and grew stage-struck, as she usually did over good things. The next day she took a " little walk " from Boston to Roxbury to consult her cousin, Dr. Windship, about the play, and rode home in the new cars just established. She adds : " In the evening went to teach at Warren Street Chapel Charity School. I'll help as I am helped, if I can. Mother says no one so poor he can't do a little for some one poorer yet."

About this time, May came to Boston to visit her aunt, Mrs. Bond, and study drawing. She had great talent, which needed just such help for its development, and Louisa rejoiced over her good luck. May was full of enthusiasm, and the sisters had a happy meeting and a real home talk. The little cottage in the snowbank was cozy and warm, but Elizabeth's delicate health kept them anxious ; this was a shadow which hung persistently over them in spite of the good times.

Louisa found constant use for her theatre pass. On one occasion she saw Forrest as *Othello*. She writes : " It is funny to see how attentive all the

once cool gentlemen are to Miss Alcott, now she has a pass to the new theatre." She went to a little party at her aunt's on the evening of her birthday, November 29th, which she greatly enjoyed. She says: "May looked very pretty and seemed to be a favourite. The boys teased me about being an authoress, and said I'd be famous yet. Will if I can, but something else may be better for me."

Birthdays were serious occasions to Louisa, but this one was brighter than usual. She had letters from home and a pretty pin from her father, so she went to bed happy.

December was a story-writing month—Christmas and New Year tales. The active brain spun them out for the money. One, "The Cross on the Church Tower," suggested by the tower before her window, must have specially appealed to her.

She was beginning, however, to feel the need of something better in her writing. Her stories answered their purpose, and helped her in times of need, but nothing more; there was scarcely one which, in later days, she thought worth preserving. She longed to do something really good; she felt that she had talent above the columns of the weekly papers, if she only had a chance to try her wings. Even now, dim ideas of a novel began to hover around her, but it had no shape as yet. Their own family life with its many experiences, she thought would prove most interesting, beginning with her father's boyhood at Spindle Hill. The Temple School, *Fruitlands*, Boston and Concord, she had planned as chapters. She says: "The trials and

triumphs of the Pathetic Family would make a capital book ; may I live to do it."

And she did ; not the book indeed, that she intended about a Pathetic Family, but a winsome study of four wholesome, happy, hearty girls, who are always peeping from a sunny little book, to chat with girls of coming generations about the same pleasures, aspirations, and experiences which come to all girls through all time.

Louisa's income was now increased by three hours' work as daily governess, which included caring for a little invalid.

"It is hard work," she writes, "but I can do it ; and am glad to sit in a large fine room part of each day, after my sky-parlour, which has nothing pretty in it, and only the gray tower and blue sky outside, as I sit at the window writing. I love luxury ; but freedom and independence better."

The New Year, 1857, began brightly ; the same kind cousin, L. W., gave her her first new silk dress, and she felt as if all the Hancocks, Quincys, and great folk of Boston beheld her as she went forth proudly arrayed.

Mr. Alcott, who had been on a lecture tour to New York and Philadelphia, finished up at Boston on his way home. His trip, as usual, had yielded but little money. "Why don't rich people, who enjoy his talks, pay for them?" Louisa asked. "Philosophers are always poor, and too modest to pass around their own hats."

She was very proud of May's first portrait, a crayon head of her mother, which was an excellent likeness and brought joy to the family. Her father stayed

some time in Boston, and gave many interesting talks to a circle which appreciated him and saw him always at his best, and Louisa enjoyed having him so constantly with her. There was wonderful sympathy between the two. Louisa, the capable, practical breadwinner, adored the philosopher in her father, the spirit which in spite of many downward pullings could always rise above the clouds. Her definition of a philosopher, at which no doubt her own father laughed most heartily of all, was " a man up in a balloon, with his family and friends holding the ropes which confine him to earth, and trying to haul him down."

In February, she ran home as a " Valentine," then she went back to work till May, when anxiety for her sister drove her home for good. The last months in Boston were very pleasant. She finished teaching and went about and rested after her labours ; she was a most social person and loved to visit. She still appeared on Sunday evenings at Mr. Parker's, and there among the other guests she met F. B. Sanborn, the young educator, whose broad mind and able instruction has made from that day to this a notable centre of learning in Concord.

She also saw young Edwin Booth as *Brutus*, liking him better than his father, and on the 10th of May she reached home, having accomplished what she had set out to do—" supported myself, written eight stories, taught four months, earned a hundred dollars and sent money home."

Now came the real shadow on her life, the heaviest, because it was the first, and sorrow is the hardest teacher one can have. Beth was slipping away from

them ; they did not realize it at first, the change was so gradual, but when Louisa came from Boston, a heavy weight fell upon her heart when she saw her sister's face.

"It was no paler, and but little thinner than in the autumn, yet there was a strange transparent look about it, as if the mortal was being slowly refined away, and the immortal shining through the frail flesh, with an indescribable beauty."

There was a seeming hush in the little household at Walpole ; there was a drawn and haggard look on the mother's face, a gentle pity in the father's eyes, while Louisa, Anna, and May tried to shut out all thought of the trial that must come. The most serene among them was Elizabeth herself ; her beautiful disposition shone forth and lent her a strength that was surprising. Those about her dared not look forward to what home would be without her sweet and gentle presence, for she was, above all, the "home girl," with countless little home graces. These may not be noticed in the humdrum of every day ; but when a pause comes and the signs are seen no more, we cannot get used to the silence and void their absence makes.

Here the philosopher's influence shone forth, and the brave family lived to the height of his teaching. Death was knocking at the door, but they held him off and did what they could to defy him.

It was about this time that Louisa read Charlotte Brontë's life, such a contrast to her own, with its home spirit and its innocent pleasures, that the girl's heart, very tender just then with the cloud upon it,

ached for the three lonely sisters on the moors. She writes :

"Wonder if I shall ever be famous enough for people to care to read my story and struggles. I can't be a Charlotte Brontë, but I may do a little something yet."

In July, Mr. Alcott's mother came to visit them. She was eighty-four, but a strong, industrious, and wise old lady, and a great delight to the Alcott girls, who clustered around her, never tired of listening to anecdotes of their father's boyhood. "A sweet old lady," writes Louisa, "and I am glad to know her and see where Father gets his nature. . . . A house needs a grandma in it. As we sat talking over Father's boyhood, I never realized so plainly before, how much he has done for himself. His early life sounded like a pretty old romance, and Mother added the love passages."

By August, Elizabeth grew so much worse that they decided to go back to Concord. Mr. Alcott was never happy far away from Emerson, the one true friend who loved, understood, and helped him. There was a small estate-for sale in the eastern part of Concord ; on it was a substantial though very old farmhouse, the *Orchard House*, as it was afterwards called ; it had been standing for nearly two centuries when the Alcotts became the owners of it. It was an easy distance from Emerson's house, and adjoining it, on the east, was Hawthorne's home, *The Wayside*, which had been the Alcotts' *Hillside* ten years before.

Mrs. Alcott took the invalid to the seashore while the girls made the move from Walpole to Concord, but there was so much to be done to make the old

farmhouse habitable, that they rented half of another house while repairs were going on. They fitted up a pleasant room for Beth, and when she came home, more shadowy than ever, they all settled down for the winter, uncertain what it would bring them.

The dear old grandmother went home with her son, but Louisa stayed where she was, she had no heart for Boston; she hovered around the sick-room, and on her birthday she writes :

"Twenty-five this month. I feel my quarter of a century heavy on my shoulders just now. I lead two lives : one serene, gay with plays, and so on ; the other, very sad, in Betty's room, for though she wishes us to act and loves to see us get ready, the shadow is there, and Mother and I see it. Betty loves to have me with her, and I am with her at night, for Mother needs rest. Betty says she feels 'strong' when I am near."

This is tenderly described in "Little Women," when *Jo* keeps vigil with this beloved sister in "The Valley of the Shadow."

"Often when she woke, *Jo* found Beth reading in her well-worn little book, heard her singing softly to beguile the sleepless night, or saw her lean her face upon her hands while slow tears dropped through the transparent fingers ; and *Jo* would lie watching her, with thoughts too deep for tears, feeling that Beth, in her simple, unselfish way, was trying to wean herself from the dear old life and fit herself for the life to come, by sacred words of comfort, quiet prayers, and the music she loved so well."

During those days of waiting, her hands were never

idle, and she would make little things and drop them down to the school children who passed beneath her window, and she would smile down into the upturned grateful faces. But by and by the needle grew "too heavy" and the work was put away for ever.

The poem which came from Louisa's full heart at this time tells all one cares to know of the sad parting. In "Little Women" she called it

MY BETH.

Sitting patient in the shadow
Till the blessed light shall come,
A serene and saintly presence
Sanctifies our troubled home.
Earthly joys, and hopes, and sorrows,
Break like ripples on the strand
Of the deep and solemn river
Where her willing feet now stand.

Oh, my sister, passing from me,
Out of human care and strife,
Leave me as a gift, those virtues
Which have beautified your life.
Dear, bequeath me that great patience
Which has power to sustain
A cheerful, uncomplaining spirit,
In its prison-house of pain.

Give me, for I need it sorely,
Of that courage wise and sweet,
Which has made the path of duty
Green beneath your willing feet.
Give me that unselfish nature,
That with charity divine
Can pardon wrong for love's dear sake.
Meek heart, forgive me mine!

Thus our daily parting loseth
Something of its bitter pain,
And while learning this hard lesson,
My great loss becomes my gain.

For the touch of grief will render
My wild nature more serene,
Give to life new aspirations—
A new trust in the unseen.

Henceforth, safe across the river,
I shall see forever more
A beloved household spirit,
Waiting for me on the shore.
Hope and faith, born of my sorrow,
Guardian angels shall become,
And the sister gone before me,
By their hands shall lead me home.

Louisa never spoke of this grief as she did in those few pathetic sentences in "Little Women."

"So the spring days came and went, the sky grew clearer, the earth greener, the flowers were up fair and early, and the birds came back in time to say good-bye to Beth, who, like a tired but trustful child, clung to the hands that had led her all her life, as father and mother guided her tenderly through the valley of the shadow, and gave her up to God. . . . As Beth had hoped, the 'tide went out easily'; and in the dark hour before the dawn, on the bosom where she had drawn her first breath, she drew her last, with no farewell, but one loving look and a little sigh. . . .

"When morning came, for the first time in many months, the fire was out, Jo's place was empty, and the room was very still. But a bird sang blithely on a budding bough close by, the snowdrops blossomed freshly at the window, and the spring sunshine streamed in like a benediction over the placid face upon the pillow—a face so full of painless peace that those who loved it best smiled through their tears, and thanked God that Beth was well at last."

They buried her in Sleepy Hollow close by, and Emerson, Thoreau, Sanborn, and John Pratt carried her tenderly to her last home, which she chose herself. They sang her favourite hymn, they decked the house with her favourite flowers, they made of her memory a bright spot, for the shadow was lifted and the pain was gone.

CHAPTER VII

PROGRESS AND POVERTY

It took the family several months to settle down after Elizabeth's death. She had been such a quiet force in their lives that they did not recognize how much her influence had governed them ; the house where she died became haunted with sad memories, and their own not being quite ready, they occupied temporarily a wing of the Hawthorne place which had once been theirs. The Hawthornes were abroad at the time, so the arrangement was satisfactory all round, for the Alcotts' property was adjoining, and improvements could be superintended on the spot.

Mrs. Alcott soon became absorbed in the new home, and found much comfort in watching its growth. Mr. Alcott was already planning orchards and outside improvements. May had gone to Boston, and Anna had picked up the threads of a happy romance which had been laid aside when Beth began to fail ; so Louisa, in the long spring days which followed, slipped into the dead sister's place, keeping house for her father and mother, trying to hold the restless spirit in check, and watching with much interest the growing of Anna's pretty love story. John Pratt had been a pupil at Sanborn's school when the Alcotts moved back to Concord,

and had taken part with the girls in plays, charades, and masquerades. He was the son of Minot Pratt, a well-known resident of Concord, a good friend of Mr. Alcott's, with whom he sympathized in many ways. Minot Pratt, a celebrated botanist, was wonderfully successful in the cultivation and rearing of flowers; he had also been a member of the famous Brook Farm community, which, like *Fruitlands*, had come to nothing, so, as there was much in common between the two men, it is small wonder that their children should be thrown in pleasant association.

John Pratt, as Louisa described him, was "handsome, healthy, and happy" when his engagement to Anna Alcott was announced. Louisa, though outwardly rejoicing, took the news very much to heart. "So another sister is gone," she writes, and later: "I moaned in private over my great loss, and said I'd never forgive John for taking Anna from me, but I will, if he makes her happy, and turn to little May for my comfort."

It was just here that the hungry soul of this strong, self-reliant young woman cried out. Love and sympathy she depended upon, and the father and mother, who had never failed her, came to her rescue now. In the first days of her grief, when, unaccustomed to sleeping through a whole night, she would wake up thinking she heard the dear invalid calling to her, the sense of her loss was very keen; it was then that her mother would come to her in the darkness, and soothe her as only mothers can, and talk of patience and resignation, of which Mrs. Alcott herself was such a beautiful example.

As the bitterness wore away and the active mind was stirring again, she had long talks with her father in his study, and gained from him a bit of that quiet philosophy which had kept him serene through so many trials.

Added to this, her own energy and strong will served her now. Once more, in the intervals of housekeeping, she took up her pen, and before she knew it, stories began to grow in her brain. They were all simple tales, but something of her own love and sorrow had crept into them, making them very sweet and very true to life. Little by little the magazines began to call for her work and to pay more liberally, and Louisa found herself able to provide greater comforts for the household.

In June, May came home, and Anna returned from a visit to Pratt Farm, so Louisa ran off for a little change to Boston, where her hosts of relatives always made it pleasant for her. Here she saw Charlotte Cushman and had "stage fever" so badly that she came nearer being an actress than ever in her life before. Dr. Windship asked Mr. Barry to let her act at his theatre, and it was all privately arranged that she was to do *Widow Pottle*, for the dress was a good disguise and she knew the part well, but poor Louisa never got her dramatic machinery wound up that something did not happen. Mr. Barry broke his leg at a most inconvenient moment, so she had to give it up and swallow her disappointment as best she could. Fortunately at this period the new house in Concord called for all hands to help in the moving, and Louisa hurried home to a busy, happy time, for work always agreed

with the Alcott girls. In July, her journal tells us something about it :

“ Went into the new house and began to settle. Father is happy ; Mother glad to be at rest ; Anna is in bliss with her gentle John, and May busy over her pictures. I have plans simmering, but must sweep and dust and wash my dish-pans a little longer till I see my way. Worked off my stage fever in writing a story, and felt better ; also a moral tale and got twenty-five dollars, which pieced up our summer gowns and bonnets all round. The inside of my head can at least cover the outside. . . . The weeklies will all take stories ; and I can simmer novels while I do my housework, so see my way to a little money, and perhaps more by and by, if I ever make a hit. . . . Much company to see the new house. All seem glad that the wandering family is anchored at last.”

This new home they christened *Orchard House* on account of its fine apple trees. It looked out on the famous Lexington Street, up which the British retreated in Revolutionary days, and behind it was a range of hills, the green of the pines relieved by patches of grey birch. There were magnificent elms shading the house, and the apple trees were ever changing in hue. The trees were Mr. Alcott's special pride ; he says of them :

“ The ancient elms in front of the house, of a hundred years' standing and more, are the pride of the yard, luxuriant and far-spreading, overshadowing the roof and gables, yet admitting light into hall and chambers. Sunny rooms—sunny household.”

In front of the house stretched a broad meadow,

supposed once to have been the bed of the Connecticut River. A charming woodland path wound upward to the very heart of the hills, to the summit of which the Alcott girls loved to climb. It is doubtless upon these heights, where they met many an afternoon, that the "Little Women" built their castles in the air, and in memory of their childish days kept up the old play of Pilgrim's Progress. They called the top of this hill the "Delectable Mountain," it being the highest point, and naturally their goal. Here is Miss Alcott's own description of it in "Little Women":

" . . . Through an opening in the woods one could look across the wide blue river, the meadows on the other side, far over the outskirts of the great city [that must have been Boston, only twenty miles away] to the green hills that rose to meet the sky. The sun was low, and the heavens glowed with the splendour of an autumn sunset. Gold and purple clouds lay on the hilltops; and rising high into the ruddy light were silvery-white peaks that shone like the airy spires of some Celestial City."

Concord was noted for its wonderful sunsets, and Hawthorne, who loved the solitude of this special ridge, enjoyed the brilliant colours as he paced his favourite haunt, treading down the tangle of undergrowth until he wore an irregular path upon the brow of the hill, which is distinctly visible to this day. Often, no doubt, he came across this group of sisters: Anna with her sewing, May with her drawing, and Louisa reading aloud to them in her clear, delightful way; and many a time the shy man, who seldom strayed from the shelter of his own

sweet household, would be drawn into their little circle in spite of himself, for Louisa's broad sociability reached out to all who passed her way.

Across the meadow stretch rose other hills leading to Walden, which Thoreau loved and where he often lived for weeks at a time, in the very heart of nature. These hills were not so high, but they were beautiful and well wooded, so *Orchard House* was surrounded on all sides by something to delight the eye, and Mr. Alcott had the good sense in remodelling the place, to use only subdued colours in freshening its exterior, something in harmony with the bark of the trees, the colour of the earth, and the green of the leaves. In walking over the grounds of *Orchard House*, the eye was pleased with unexpected glimpses of his rustic work ; a table here, a bench there, a little foot-bridge, or a low fence.

Inside the three girls lent their skilful aid. They painted and papered the rooms with their own hands, they laid carpets, they made and hung their own curtains, and after all was in order, May put the finishing touches with her beautiful drawings, and the result was a home, sweet, simple, and refined, which opened wide its doors to the friends in Concord.

For some time the festive air of the new home kept Louisa contented. She was never so happy as when among her friends, and those who had lent most colour to her life were there around them. The Alcotts and the Emersons were very intimate, and Dr. Edward Emerson, Emerson's only son, gives us a most delightful picture of Louisa and her sisters at this period (1858). Louisa he described as fine

looking, with regular, though massive features and wavy brown hair. Anna he did not consider pretty, but so friendly and sweet-tempered "that the beauty of expression made up for the lack of it in her features. May, the youngest, was a tall, well-made blonde; the lower part of her face was irregular, but she had beautiful blue eyes and brilliant yellow hair."

Once, during a visit he paid at the Alcott house with his mother and sister, he tells us how Louisa entertained them in her own witty fashion, with burlesques on *her* father's and *his* father's writings, calling Mr. Emerson, *Rolf Walden Emerboy*. He continues:

"In Concord at Mr. Sanborn's school, the Alcott girls were in demand for private theatricals, their talent and experience being well known. If Louisa could make our sides ache with laughter, Anna could cause our handkerchiefs to come out, and much swallowing of lumps in the throat.

"The evenings at the Alcott house also left delightful memories. Although a long walk, the bait was good enough to draw the boys and girls often. The hearty and motherly quality of Mrs. Alcott's welcome was something to remember. There was a piano—none of the best—and May, in the highest spirits, would swoop to the stool and all would fall to dancing; the mother herself often joining us. One of the guests would relieve May, and give her a turn. Then, with or without voices, we stood by the piano singing 'Rolling Home,' 'Ubi sunt O pocula,' 'Music in the Air,' and after the war began, 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' 'John

Brown,' ' Marching Along,' and other stirring songs fresh from camp."

He tells of the jolly evenings on the porch, where they watched the twilight deepen into dark, and told "creepy" stories, and ate chestnuts and apples amid thrills of horror, and went home at ten o'clock at the very latest.

Masquerades were a great delight to these young ones, and there were many in Concord. Their favourite one was the sheet party, where everyone looked alike, draped in white sheets, a white cloth with eyeslits over the face, and a pillow-case pinned tightly around the scalp, entirely concealing the hair, and hanging down behind.

"These pleasant pictures of the past," Dr. Emerson says in conclusion, "may read a lesson. Great pleasures may be had simply and cheaply; good-nature, self-help, mother-wit, independence, are such good ingredients, that a cake baked with them is safe to turn out well."

Truly the days at Concord sped gaily. The thunders of war were heard in the distance, to be sure, but the call to arms had not yet reached the placid little town. Louisa's wings were beginning to flap again with the strong desire to go out into the world, but perhaps it was as well that during those hot times of discussion she found herself safely hemmed in by this little band of philosophers, for she, being naturally impulsive and enthusiastic, thought of the threatening war only as of a struggle between the North and the South over the freedom or bondage of the slave. And she and Mr. Hawthorne, her next-door neighbour, must have had

many a spirited argument on that very subject, for though he was loyal to the North, he always contended that abolition was *not* the keynote of the war. In a letter written by him in 1861, he says: "Though I approve of the war as much as any man, I don't quite understand what we are fighting for, or what definite result can be expected."

Emerson, Alcott, and Thoreau were, in their calmer way, as enthusiastic as Louisa herself; though with their riper judgment they held themselves in check. But F. B. Sanborn, the young school-teacher of Concord, was not so discreet, and came very near arrest and imprisonment for his open championship of John Brown.

To-day, safe and peaceful under one flag, the people of the North, South, East, and West of America wonder at the intense feeling that hung over the question of that day, but to Louisa, born in the midst of the struggle, it was all very real and tragic. She longed with all her girl's soul—she was a girl still in spite of her twenty-six years—to get into the thick of it and fight. Sanborn seemed to her something of a hero, for in his place she would have done likewise. She placed him from that moment side by side with the men she most admired, and a lifelong friendship was sealed between them, for she liked his independence and his spirit.

He had come to Concord comparatively unknown, but presently the modest school he opened for boys and girls began to attract attention and soon became popular, while children of the best families swelled his ranks, for he was friend as well as teacher,

and made study a delight to his pupils. Miss Alcott has many times made use of him in her stories, and while she and her sisters were too old to be regular pupils, they joined in all the frolics which relieved the hours of study. Indeed it was through Sanborn's interest that Louisa's "Hospital Sketches" appeared in the Boston *Commonwealth* some years later, when he became editor, and through them she became better known than ever before.

However happy they were at *Orchard House*, there was still very little money in the family pocket-book, and a very persistent wolf knocking at the door. In spite of the many delights of Concord, the peace and quiet were trying to Louisa ; she was not content to drift, she wanted to fight and beat the waves with her sturdy arms, and push ahead, for she had long ago made up her mind that the family fortunes lay in her hands. In October she decided to set out once more for Boston, resolving as she said "to take Fate by the throat and shake a living out of her."

This she succeeded in doing with a pluck and energy that amazed her friends. Louisa was continually "amazing her friends." There was a bubbling spirit of youth in her that would not be quenched ; she had in her short life, received as many if not more hard knocks than most girls, but she was never "downed," and the success which pleased her most was what she had won after a vigorous battle.

She spent the year in Boston as governess ; she lived in her old "sky parlour," and in her spare time fell to work on her stories, visited her friends,

sewed, went to lectures, and the theatre very often; she was happy because she was busy.

"The past year," she writes on her twenty-sixth birthday, "has brought us our first death and betrothal—two events that change my life. I can see that these experiences have taken a deep hold and changed or developed me. Lizzie helps me spiritually, and a little success makes me more self-reliant. . . . I feel as if I could write better now—more truly of things I have felt, and therefore *know*. I hope I shall yet do my great book, for that seems to be my work and I am growing up to it. I even think of trying the *Atlantic*. There's ambition for you! . . . If Mr. Lowell takes the one Father carried to him, I shall think I can do something."

In December, 1858, Mr. Alcott once again started out on a lecture tour, and May came to Boston and stayed with her sister while she took drawing lessons. They spent Christmas at home, and the following January found Louisa at home again nursing her mother, who was very ill. She was always most gentle and skilful in a sick room; she thought she had a gift for it. "If I couldn't write or act, I'd try it," she said; "I may yet."

Her most important story at this time was "Mark Field's Mistake," to which she added a sequel. "Had a queer time over it," she says in her journal, "getting up at night to write it, being too full to sleep." This was a very bad habit which grew upon her in later years, when the books and the stories came fast and thick.

"'Mark' is a success," she writes, "and much praised. . . . Busy life, writing, sewing, getting

all I can from lectures, books, and good people. Life is my college. May I graduate well and earn some honours ! ”

One thing this year in Boston did prove to her—that teaching was *not* her vocation ; she resolved thenceforth to do as little as possible, for the writing was beginning to pay much better. She went back to Concord in April, glad to be there, if the truth must be known. This had been her third attempt at supporting herself in Boston, and she had done far better than she had hoped. She had grown in every way ; she had gained experience, she stood firmly on her own strong feet ; the same feet which carried her from Concord to Boston one day, a distance of twenty miles, and supported her through a dance the same evening without the faintest fatigue.

Louisa Alcott at twenty-seven was a fine, healthy, heroic young creature, one destined always to stay young, though the world grew old around her. In November, her birth month, her first great luck came to her. “ Hurrah ! ” she writes, “ my story was accepted and Lowell asked if it was not a translation from the German, it was so unlike most tales. I felt much set up and my fifty dollars will be very happy money. People seem to think it a great thing to get into the *Atlantic* ; but I’ve not been pegging away all these years in vain, and I may yet have books, and publishers, and a fortune of my own. Success has gone to my head and I wander a little. Twenty-seven years old and very happy ! ”

John Brown was executed on December 2, 1859, and Louisa mourned with all the others in Concord. It was the first note of the war, and the men

and women stood ready to do their part, awaiting the call.

In March, 1860, she wrote "A Modern Cinderella," making Anna the heroine, and John Pratt the hero; this she sent to the *Atlantic* and they accepted it at once. It is a simple little story with something of the same charm that hovers round "Little Women" and "An Old-Fashioned Girl," and for that reason it was sure to attract. Quite elated over this success, she began another story, "By the River," but one could never tell by the tone of it how in reality she was bubbling over with happiness and hope, for it is mournful to a degree, and sounds like a funeral dirge. This was most unnatural for Louisa, who, though a young woman of many moods, was generally cheerful on paper. She tells us how on meeting Miss Rebecca Harding, who had made some stir as an author, the two sat apart and compared notes. Louisa describes her as "a handsome, fresh, quiet woman, who says she never had any troubles, though she writes about woes. I told her I had had lots of troubles; so I write jolly tales; and we wondered why we each did so."

She took to sewing after this; her clever ideas got into her needle quite as often as they did into her pen. She made a beautiful ball dress for May, and two riding habits for May and herself. "So one of our dreams came true," she says, "and we really did 'dash away on horseback.'"

Being tall, graceful girls they must have looked well on horseback, and I dare say harum-scarum Jo told the absolute truth when she described in "Little Women" how *Amy* learned to ride. "She used

to practise mounting, holding the reins, and sitting straight on an old saddle in the tree."

All the Concord boys and girls rode horseback, so it is pretty certain that Louisa and May had many a companion to share the pleasure of those fair spring days. Louisa was adored by the young people in Concord, especially the boys, and that is perhaps the real secret of why she never married. She liked men of ripe years and hoary locks, or boys "young and tender" like those in Concord or Boston, but men of her own age stirred no passing emotion. She tells us of a funny lover, aged forty, who lost his heart to her in the cars. He was a handsome Southerner, and called upon her to pay his addresses. When she refused to see him, he haunted the road, with his hat off, to the amusement of her sisters, who had great fun over "Jo's lover." "My adorers are all queer," she adds.

In the early part of May, Theodore Parker died in Florence, where he had gone for his health. In June she went to Boston, to the memorial meeting for him, which was very beautiful. "I was glad to have known so good a man and been called 'friend' by him."

On the 23rd of May, Anna was married. Her uncle, the Rev. S. J. May, performed the ceremony, and in "Little Women" Miss Alcott has given us a vivid description of the sweet, old-fashioned wedding, the difference being that Beth was *not* there, only the two comely sisters, in their thin grey gowns and roses, and the bride in her silver-grey silk and little white bonnet, with the lilies of the valley that her John loved best.

It must have been a solemn moment, this going away of the eldest daughter, but the day was beautiful, "the house full of sunshine, flowers, friends, and happiness," and their parents' wedding-day besides. "I mourn the loss of my Nan," says Louisa, "and am not comforted." Nevertheless, knowing how closely smiles followed tears in Louisa's nature, we can imagine her the life of the fun and frolic that followed, when the old folks danced around the bridal pair on the lawn, making a pretty picture beneath their Revolutionary elm.

"Then with tears and kisses, our dear girl went happily away with her good John, and we ended our first wedding. Mr. Emerson kissed her, and I thought that honour would make even matrimony endurable, for he is the god of my idolatry, and has been for years."

Though she might make merry at the wedding feast, she loved this elder sister as her second self, and we can picture Louisa, after the bride's departure, rushing up to the garret, flinging herself down in a heap, and bedewing the old chests and rag bags with a few hearty tears.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIGN OF THE HORSESHOE

MEANWHILE the family fortunes had been looking up, and with the appointment of Mr. Alcott as Superintendent of Schools in Concord, there was much rejoicing. He soon began to change the order of things. Just as years ago, he had put forth new ideas about teaching, so with the same will, he insisted upon them now. The children were always first to him, and they soon began to look upon the tall, white-haired, stately gentleman as their friend and playmate. In Louisa's first letter to Anna after her marriage, written the following Sunday indeed, she gives a humorous description of one of their frolics :

" MRS. PRATT—

" MY DEAR MADAM :

" The news of the town is as follows, and I present it in the most journallesque style of correspondence. After the bridal train had departed, the mourners withdrew to their respective homes ; and the bereaved family solaced their woe by washing dishes for two hours, and bolting the remains of the funeral baked meats. At four, having got settled down, we were all routed up by the appearance of

a long procession of children filing down our lane, headed by the Misses H. and R. Father rushed to the cellar and appeared with a large basket of apples, which went the rounds with much effect. The light infantry formed in a semi-circle, and was watered by the matron and maids. It was really a pretty sight—these seventy children loaded with wreaths and flowers, standing under the elm in the sunshine, singing in full chorus the song I wrote for them [to the tune of ‘Wait for the Wagon’].”

Here are the first and the last verses, but we may be sure that all four verses were sung with a will by the light-hearted little group.

The world lies fair about us, and a friendly sky above,
Our lives are full of sunshine, our hearts are full of love ;
Few cares or sorrows sadden the beauty of our day,
We gather simple pleasures, like daisies by the way.

Oh ! sing with cheery voices,
Like robins on the tree ;
For little lads and lasses,
As blithe of heart should be.

There's not a cloud in heaven, but drops its silent dew,
Nor violet in the meadow, but blesses with its hue ;
Nor happy child in Concord, who may not do its part,
To make the great world better, by innocence of heart.

Oh, blossom in the sunshine,
Beneath the village tree ;
For little lads and lasses
Are the fairest flowers we see.

“It was a neat little compliment to the Superintendent and his daughter,” goes on Louisa in her bulletin to Anna, “who was glad to find that her ‘pome’ was a favourite among the ‘lads and lasses’ who sang it ‘with cheery voices like robins on the tree.’ Father put the finishing stroke to the

spectacle, by going off at full speed, hoppity-skip, and all the babes followed in a whirl of rapture at the idea. He led them up and down, and round and round, until they were tired; then they fell into order, and with a farewell song, marched away, seventy of the happiest little ones I ever wish to see."

She goes on to tell of a reception given to John Brown's widow, his widowed daughter-in-law, and his little grandson. The hospitable Alcotts made preparations for twenty at the most, but when forty came, she says, "our neat little supper turned out a regular 'tea-fight.' We got through it," she concludes, in her letter to Anna, 'but it was an awful hour; and Mother wandered in her mind, utterly lost in a grove of teapots, while B. pervaded the neighbourhood, demanding hot water, and we girls sowed cake broadcast through the land.'"

She continues with her description:

"When the plates were empty and the teapots dry, people wiped their mouths and confessed at last that they had done. A conversation followed in which . . . Uncle and Father mildly upset the world; . . . then some Solomon suggested that the Alcotts must be tired, and everyone departed but C. and S. We had a polka by Mother and Uncle, the lancers by C. and B., an *étude* by S., after which scrabblings of feast appeared, and we 'drained the dregs of every cup,' all cakes and pies we gobbled up, then peace fell upon us and our remains were interred decently."

With all her festive soul Louisa loved entertainments, whether public or private. She wrote a song

for her father's annual school festival. "Father got up the affair," she says in her journal, "and such a pretty affair was never seen in Concord before. He said: 'We spend much on our cattle and flower shows, let us each spring have a show of our children, and begrudge nothing for their culture.' The schools all met in the hall, four hundred strong, a pretty posy-bed with a border of proud parents and friends. Father was in glory, like a happy shepherd with a flock of sportive lambs; for all did something. Each school had its badge—one, pink ribbons; one, green shoulder-knots; one, wreaths of pop-corn on the curly pates. One school to whom Father had read 'Pilgrim's Progress' told the story, one child after the other popping up to say his or her part, and at the end a little tot walked forward, saying with a pretty air of wonder: 'And behold, it was all a dream!'"

The children surprised Mr. Alcott on this occasion with a gift of George Herbert's "Poems" and "Pilgrim's Progress," beautifully bound, as a token of their love and respect, so, as Louisa said, "the Alcotts were uplifted in their vain minds." It is wonderful the hold "Pilgrim's Progress" always has on the minds of children; the little Alcott girls had heard the tale from babyhood, and to every Concord child who came under Mr. Alcott's inspection, the story was as familiar as the alphabet.

About this time the town was wild with what Louisa called the "gymnastic fever." "Everyone," she says, "has become a perambulating windmill." It attacked the young people fiercely. The boys, no doubt, thought it fine training for the future soldiers,

and the girls approved of it because they wanted to show that Concord had as much muscle as brain. She tells about this popular craze in one of her stories, "The King of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts," which is the romance of the leader of the gymnasium, and a very graceful, active young pupil. Her opening description of an evening class is vivid and amusing :

"Five and twenty ladies, all in a row, sat on one side of the hall, looking very much as if they felt like the little old woman who fell asleep on the king's highway, and awoke with abbreviated drapery, for they were all arrayed in gray tunics, and Turkish continuations, profusely adorned with many-coloured trimmings. Five and twenty gentlemen, all in a row, sat on the opposite side of the hall, looking somewhat subdued, as men are apt to do, when they fancy they are in danger of making fools of themselves. They also were in costume, for all the dark ones had grown piratical, in red shirts, and the light ones, nautical, in blue, while a few boldly appeared in white, making up in starch and studs what they lost in colour, and all were more or less Byronic as to collar.

"On the platform appeared a pile of dumb-bells, a regiment of clubs, and a pyramid of bean-bags, and stirring nervously among them, a foreign-looking gentleman, the new leader of a class lately formed by Dr. Thor Turner, whose mission it was to strengthen the world's spine and convert it to a belief in air and exercise by setting it to balancing its poles, and spinning merrily while enjoying the 'sun-cure' on a large scale."

"Abby and I are among the pioneers," she writes further in her journal, "and the delicate vegetable productions," meaning the Alcott girls, who never ate meat, "clash their cymbals in private, when the beef-eating young ladies faint away."

The *Orchard House* guests came thick and fast, and people of note began to find out the quiet Alcotts and enjoy visiting them. "Saturday," writes Louisa to her aunt, Mrs. Bond, "we had J. G. Whittier, Charlotte Cushman, Miss Stebbins, the sculptress, and Mr. Stuart, conductor of the underground railroad of this charming free country; so you see our humble place of abode is perking up, and when the great 'authoress and artist' are fairly out of the shell, we shall be an honour to the community and a terror to the foe."

After Anna's wedding, Louisa ran up to Boston to see the little farce she had written so many years ago, presented at last at the Howard Athenæum. She sat proudly in a box, and a bouquet was handed to the author, but it was not well acted after all the waiting, much to her disappointment, so she turned to her stories with redoubled vigour. The *Atlantic* took a great many, and the steadily increasing pay was very encouraging; it was delightful to feel that when "Plato needed new shirts, and Minerva a pair of boots, and Hebe a fall hat"* she had only to write a story with those praiseworthy objects in view, and behold! they would appear. But there was nothing as yet in these numerous efforts to secure any lasting fame.

In August, 1860, she began to write "Moods."

* An autumn hat.

She was full of it, and "genius burned" so fiercely that for four weeks she wrote all day long, and planned all night long, and seemed perfectly happy when at last the rough copy of the book was "put away to settle." Mr. Emerson offered to read it, but the manuscript was not ready for inspection.

In October she writes: "I went to Boston and saw the Prince of Wales trot over the Common with his train at a review, a yellow-haired laddie very like his mother. Fanny W. and I nodded and waved as he passed, and he openly winked his boyish eye at us, for Fanny with her yellow curls and wild waving looked rather rowdy, and the poor little prince wanted some fun. We laughed and thought we had been more distinguished by the saucy wink than by a stately bow. Boys are always jolly—even princes."

About this time Mrs. Alcott paid a visit to her brother, and Louisa was left housekeeper. With her usual energy she gave her whole mind to her home duties and "dreamed dip-toast, talked apple-sauce, thought pies, and wept drop-cakes." Anna came up to cheer her in her struggles, and "Moods" was brought out, read, laughed, and cried over. "So I felt encouraged," writes Louisa, "and will touch it up when duty no longer orders me to make a burnt-offering of myself."

Her twenty-eighth birthday she celebrated at home with her father, and they exchanged gifts. He gave her Emerson's picture, and she gave him a ream of paper, so both were pleased.

May, the luck child, received a gift of money for drawing lessons, so she went to Boston to take them.

"She is one of the fortunate ones and gets what she wants easily," writes Louisa. "I have to grub for my help or go without it. Good for me, doubtless, or it wouldn't be so ; so cheer up, Louisa, and grind away !"

May's good fortune still continued ; she wanted to go to Syracuse to teach, and was able to secure a position at once. Louisa dropped everything to "sew like a steam-engine" getting her ready, and went to Boston with her to see her safely on her way. From that time these two sisters drew very close together. Louisa's big heart ached for something to take care of, to fill the place made vacant by Elizabeth's death. She was proud of May's talent and of her social success, gloried in her grace and beauty, and, as usual, forgot herself in working for others.

Emerson invited her to his class when they met to talk on genius, and Louisa was much pleased at the honour, "as all the learned ladies go." She was also asked to the John Brown meeting, but she did not go, though she sent a "pome" instead, which was published in the paper. "Not good," she writes, "I'm a better patriot than poet, and couldn't say what I felt."

The following Christmas was very quiet. "No merry-making ; for Nan and May were gone and Betty under the snow. But we are used to hard times, and as Mother says : 'while there is a famine in Kansas, we mustn't ask for sugar-plums.' All the philosophy in our house is not in the study ; a good deal is in the kitchen, where a fine old lady thinks high thoughts and does fine deeds while she cooks and scrubs."

Early in January she started work on a new book. "Success" she called it at first, but ten years later, when it made its bow to the public, it was called "Work." Unfortunately she had scarcely started when Mrs. Alcott had another severe illness, so Louisa corked up her inkstand and turned nurse. Alas ! it was not the time of fountain pens—or even of decent steel ones—else we might have found this energetic young woman, with pad upon her knee, scribbling away in the "wee sma' hours" at the invalid's bedside. However, Mrs. Alcott's strong constitution pulled her through safely, and the household rejoiced.

"Father had four talks at Emerson's," she writes a little later. "Good people came and he enjoyed them much ; made thirty dollars ; Emerson probably put in twenty. He has a sweet way of bestowing gifts—on the table, under a book, or behind a candlestick, when he thinks Father wants a little money and no one will help him to earn it. A true friend is this tender, illustrious man."

In February, 1861, she started again on "Moods" ; she worked from the second to the twenty-fifth, scarcely stopping to eat or drink. Sleeping was impossible, and for three days she did not even take time to get up in the morning, but wrote, wrote, wrote, scattering papers like a billowy sea around her. On these days she wore a green silk cap with a red bow, and an old green and red party wrap, which she wound around her as a "glory cloak." She could not eat regularly, so her mother brought her cups of tea, and her father red apples and his very best cider, while she scribbled on in her "grove"

of manuscripts, "living for immortality" as May said. Concord was having its winter fun, but little she cared; when in a "vortex," nothing mattered.

This sort of thing could not go on for ever; even Louisa's hardy frame broke down. Her head was dizzy, her legs shaky, and there was no sleep for the rampant busy mind, so she dropped her pen, "took long walks, cold baths, and had Nan up to frolic with me. Read all I had done to my family, and father said: 'Emerson must see this. Where did you get your metaphysics?' Mother pronounced it wonderful, and Anna laughed and cried as she always does over my works, saying: 'My dear, I'm proud of you.' So I had a good time, even if it never comes to anything, for it was worth something to have my three dearest sit up till midnight, listening with wide-open eyes to Lu's first novel." This home praise was very precious to her, and, one and all, they rallied around "Moods," insisting on its greatness through all its subsequent trials. For years Louisa wrestled with this, her pet child, loved more tenderly after each cuff the cruel world gave it. In "Little Women" we cannot help sympathizing with poor Jo, who "with Spartan firmness laid her first-born on the table and chopped it up as ruthlessly as any ogre. In the hope of pleasing everyone, she took everyone's advice; and, like the old man and his donkey in the fable, suited nobody."

"Her father liked the metaphysical streak which had unconsciously got into it, so it was allowed to remain though she had her doubts about it; her mother thought there was a trifle too much descrip-

tion ; out, therefore, it nearly all came, and with it many necessary links in the story. Meg admired the tragedy ; so Jo piled up the agony to suit her ; while Amy objected to the fun, and with the best intentions in life, Jo quenched the sprightly scenes which relieved the sombre character of the story. Then, to complete the ruin, she cut it down one-third, and confidingly sent the poor little romance like a picked robin, out into the big, busy world, to try its fate.

“ Well, it was printed, and she got three hundred dollars for it ; likewise plenty of praise and blame, both so much greater than she expected that she was thrown into a state of bewilderment, from which it took her some time to recover.”

Up to this time, Louisa had succeeded so well with her shorter romances that she fondly believed her highest ambition would be gratified in writing a novel. Her plot is interesting enough, her writing is excellent, but no one should read “ Moods ” by way of introduction to Miss Alcott. There is not a natural character in the story. *Sylvia*, the heroine, the child of moods, was intended by Miss Alcott to be a portrait of herself ; but any two beings more unlike than the wilful, beautiful, unreasonable, wild little *Sylvia*, and the sane, practical, dependable, self-reliant Louisa, could scarcely be conceived ; their ideas of right and wrong were totally opposed. Louisa had moods, it is true, but she also had the power to suppress them, so that they should not cause unhappiness to others, and just as Jo met *Apollyon* in “ Little Women,” so Louisa wrestled with her darker self ; but *Sylvia* never

wrestled—she let herself go, and dragged others with her.

The only point of resemblance between the two girls was in their remarkable dramatic gift; *Sylvia* being even more talented than Louisa, if we can believe the too-partial author. At any rate the book is not the wholesome food Miss Alcott usually gives us, and though it was her first effort and was counted praiseworthy by many, it should be read among the last of her works by those who truly wish to know her at her best.

Louisa's heroines had a strong leaning to the stage, which was very natural, all things considered. Even her last book, "*Jo's Boys*," contains a stage-struck little Josie, who is a more lifelike image of Louisa in her youth than many of her earlier portraits. She saw herself and her simple efforts more clearly in her later years, when her dramatic ambition was a thing of the past.

For a time "*Moods*" was laid away to "*simmer*," for in April, war was declared between the North and South, and Concord sent her company of soldier boys to Washington. "A busy time getting them ready," writes Louisa, "and a sad day seeing them off, for in a little town like this we all seem one family in times like these. At the station, the scene was very dramatic as the brave boys went away, perhaps never to come back again. I've often longed to see a war, and now I have my wish. I long to be a man; but as I can't fight, I will content myself with working for those who can."

John Brown's daughters came to board with them at a time when Louisa's head was crammed with

stories and plots, and she was forced to lay aside her pen and turn to housekeeping. It was a great disappointment, but she "had it out" with herself up in the garret, on her favourite fat rag-bag, and felt better when her "fit of woe" was over.

Her little spare time was spent in sewing for the soldiers, with an occasional run into Boston or a visit to Anna in the "dove-cot" in Chelsea. May came home in July, delighted with her first year's experience, and lucky in securing a position as drawing teacher in Sanborn's school for the coming year. It was a delight to Louisa to have her home for many reasons; she had a great flow of spirits, and her social graces made her quite a belle. This brought a great deal of outside life and breeziness into the old house, and gave Louisa many a chance to run away when the restless spirit urged her. In 1862, at the suggestion of Elizabeth P. Peabody, she was persuaded to open a kindergarten in Boston. It was her last venture in teaching, and undertaken very much against her will, out of friendship for Miss Peabody, and a very natural desire to make money. But it was too early for kindergartens; parents had not yet learned their value for very little children, and Louisa found it hard, unprofitable work, for the school did not make enough to pay her board and an assistant she was forced to have.

She went to and from Concord each day; whether walking or riding, it made no difference, forty miles a day was dull work, but home was at the end of the struggle, which was some comfort at least. In April she writes: "I gave it up, as I could do so

much better at something else. May took my place for a month, that I might keep my part of the bargain ; and I cleaned house and wrote a story, which made more than all my months of teaching. They ended in a wasted winter and a debt of forty dollars—to be paid if I sell my hair to do it.”

This forty dollars had been advanced to her for school fittings, by Mr. Fields, of Boston, who rubbed her up the wrong way by remarking : “ Stick to your teaching ; you can’t write.” She replied with her customary spirit : “ I *won’t* teach ; and I *can* write, and I’ll prove it.”

She saw a good deal of Boston society that winter, but the “ great beings ” did not impress her. She had lived too much in the fine Concord atmosphere to be caught by mere social glitter, and she found out, too, that in many cases she was asked to visit people because of her power to entertain them, which independent Louisa resented with all her honest soul.

Mr. Lowell’s praise of the tales he sent to the *Atlantic* always tuned her up to higher efforts ; they were never great efforts, but as she says in her journal : “ I enjoy romancing to suit myself ; and though my tales are silly, they are not bad ; and my sinners always have a good spot somewhere. I hope it is good drill for fancy and language, for I can do it fast ; and Mr. Lowell says my tales are so ‘ dramatic, vivid, and full of plot,’ they are just what he wants.”

There were very few writers of short stories in those times, and very few magazines which accepted such wares ; the weeklies took tales of adventure

and romance, such as Louisa wrote in her young enthusiasm, but short-story writing in itself was not the art it is to-day, and Miss Alcott's early contributions, while much better than the average story of that period, fall far short of the average story of the present. She was quick enough to feel dissatisfied, but the editors were only too anxious to get stories of earnest purpose and real people.

September and October were uneventful months ; working for the soldiers, writing thrilling tales in a state of suppressed excitement, for the war news was bad. " Anxious faces, beating hearts, and busy minds," she writes. " I like the stir in the air and long for battle, like a war-horse when he smells powder. The blood of the Mays is up ! "

Her thirtieth birthday in November occurred at home, in the midst of preparations for any sudden call to Washington, whither she had decided to go as a hospital nurse. This was, though she never dreamed it at the time, the turning-point in her career.

On this particular occasion her friends, far and near, remembered her birthday with loving gifts. Her neighbours, the Hawthornes, with whom, from the oldest to the youngest, she was a great favourite, sent her a package, for which she thanked them in the following verses :

The Hawthorne is a gracious tree,
From latest twig to parent root,
For when all others leafless stand,
It gaily blossoms and bears fruit.
On certain days a friendly wind,
Wafts from its spreading boughs a store
Of canny gifts that flutter in,
Like snowflakes at a neighbour's door.

The spinster who has just been blessed,
Finds solemn thirty much improved
By proofs that such a crabbed soul
Is still remembered and beloved.
Kind wishes "Ancient Lu" has stored
In the "best chamber" of her heart,
And every gift on Fancy's stage,
Already plays its little part.

Long may it stand, the friendly tree,
That blooms in Autumn and in Spring,
Beneath whose shade the humblest bird
May safely sit, may gratefully sing.
Time will give it an evergreen name,
Age cannot harm it—frost cannot kill;
With Emerson's pine and Thoreau's oak,
Will the Hawthorne be loved and honoured still!

When the call came at last, all Concord was as much excited as if a real company of soldiers was marching to battle, and indeed it was heroic of Louisa, though she would have been the last person to place herself upon a pedestal. It meant a sacrifice of health and strength, but no thought of self would have held her back. She gave what she had to give and gave it gladly. "I am sending my only son to the war," said her father, and truly a son's heart beat courageously under the despised "bib and tucker," as Louisa set out on her perilous journey.

CHAPTER IX

LOUISA TO THE FRONT

CERTAINLY never until the moment of starting did the full meaning of the word separation dawn upon Louisa. The summons from Washington came on December 11th, and the new nurse was ordered to start for Georgetown the very next day and report at the Union Hotel Hospital, where there was a vacancy. It was a hard post, but though disappointed at not being called to Washington, Louisa had no idea of drawing back. This offer of her services came from her heart ; it was a bit of her religion and her patriotism, and so she and her family and friends fell to work on final preparations, with all the enthusiasm that Concord and its surroundings could produce. May and young Julian Hawthorne were to be the guards of honour to the depôt, and when the last good-byes were said, and the last flutter of handkerchiefs was lost to view at the turn of the road, this brave young woman realized, as never before, what the parting meant to them all. She might never come back. The wards of the hospitals were deadly to many a strong constitution, and the accommodations, even for the sick and wounded who needed immediate attention, were of the poorest.

Mr. Alcott's philosophy, as sincere as it was wise, helped him truly in this painful hour. But the mother's full heart overflowed as she held this beloved daughter close.

"How can I let you go!" she cried in passionate protest, but the next moment the brave woman smiled through her tears. Louisa was her only "son," and she would have sent a dozen to the war if she had had them. "Go, and God be with you," she said, and so in the twilight of a muddy, dismal day Louisa and her escort tramped to the village depôt, brave enough outwardly, but depressed in spirit.

Had she been alone, Louisa might have shed a few natural tears, but May, who was very much in the same state, would have given way entirely at the first breakdown, and as Julian Hawthorne was only sixteen and much impressed by the heroism already displayed, both sisters were on their mettle, and the good-byes were said as simply and quietly as if the going off as an army nurse were an ordinary occurrence.

After a wearing day in Boston, rushing from pillar to post in search of a free pass, paying visits to interested relatives, calling for parcels here and there, dining in between, Louisa found herself at last seated in the car, waving good-bye to a tearful group at the station as the train pulled out and she was fairly started on her pilgrimage.

"A long journey," she calls it, from Boston to Washington, and it probably was, in those days of war and uncertain traffic. From Boston she went to New London, thence by the night-boat to Jersey

City. She was *not* a traveller, having seldom ventured out of Massachusetts. Boats were "rare birds" to her, and remembering an old prediction that she "was born to be drowned," the idea of sleeping in a berth struck terror to her soul. She made all sorts of funny preparations in case of sudden and immediate danger, and finally, as she tells us in "Hospital Sketches," remembering that at the swimming-school the fat girls always floated best, she pinned her hope of future safety to a certain plump old lady who shared the cabin with her. Boats were not arranged for pitching and tumbling as they are in these days, when everything is fastened securely in place, and poor Louisa spent a restless night, between her fears and the noise made by the various articles constantly falling off the shelf at the foot of her bed.

At seven the next morning she found herself in the cars again at Jersey City; very close, crowded, dingy cars, with a stove at one end, with swinging oil lamps, smoky and ill kept. Sometimes there was a water jar but often a passenger had to look forward from station to station for an opportunity to quench his thirst. Everywhere was noise, bustle, and confusion, and comforts were not looked for in those war times. Indeed, Louisa was glad to have a seat to herself, whereon she could bestow the numerous bags and bundles with which she was laden. She did not reach Washington, which was the end of the railroad journey, until dark, having been two days and one night on the way from Boston to Washington, a trip that can now be made in a day.

Georgetown was only driving distance from the capital, and Louisa was very impatient to reach her destination. Signs of the war had met her everywhere. There were military posts along the route ; troops of soldiers were drilling and marching in the barren fields ; once she saw a body of cavalry practising in the open, and everywhere men's eager, excited voices talked of the last battle or the coming attack.

At last they drove up before the door of the hospital, which loomed out of the darkness, with the Union flag flying high above it, and springing out of the carriage she ran up the steps with all the energy of her enthusiasm. As she passed beneath the frowning portals, she little knew that she had left outside forever the perfect health and the iron constitution that mere hardship and privation could never impair. But the bad ventilation, the poor food, accompanying the sleepless days and nights, and the pitiful plight of the wounded and dying, did their evil work in six weeks' time, when this bravest of soldiers was herself " ordered home on sick leave."

No period of her life was richer in impressions, and up to that time no period of her life ever reaped a fuller harvest. Her diary, which she kept regularly, and the letters she sent home, were teeming with innumerable experiences and anecdotes, all written with her usual vigour and often full of pathos. What she wrote was kept, pieced together, and afterwards published by F. B. Sanborn in the *Commonwealth*, as a series of sketches which we know to-day under the title " Hospital Sketches."

Hitherto her stories had been mere "pot-boilers," as she often called them—romantic tales, not always true to life, with sometimes almost impossible situations, written, indeed, chiefly for the much needed money. Now she had no thought of gain, generously giving all that was best in her to a noble cause, she put life into the daily jottings which afterwards took such vivid shape.

We follow *Nurse Periwinkle* in and out of the hospital wards, seeing with her eyes, hearing with her ears, knowing that all the sights and sounds are real, laughing with her, crying with her, mourning with her, as she gently folds some dead soldier's quiet hands and cuts a lock of his hair for his mother or his wife. It was a hard life, but a rich one in many ways, and in spite of the trials it brought her, Louisa would not have given up that six weeks' experience for all the other years of her usefulness.

She paints a fine picture of her first busy day at the hospital, when forty ambulances deposited their load of wounded soldiers, fresh from Fredericksburg. Even in describing the horrors her rich humour breaks out, and we laugh blithely in the midst of our shuddering. The first duty of the nurses was to wash the dirty, bedraggled heroes. She was rather daunted when the head nurse issued the order, and says in her "Hospital Sketches":

"If she had requested me to shave them all, or dance a hornpipe on the stove-funnel, I should have been less staggered, but to scrub some dozen lords of creation at a moment's notice was really—really— However, there was no time for nonsense,

and having resolved, when I came, to do everything I was bid, I drowned my scruples in my wash-bowl, clutched my soap manfully, and assuming a business-like air, made a dab at the first dirty specimen I saw, bent on performing my task. . . . Some of them took the performance like sleepy children, leaning their tired heads against me as I worked, others looked grimly scandalized, and several of the roughest coloured like bashful girls."

It was among the first lot that Miss Alcott found her little sergeant. "Baby B." she called him, and paid many a glowing tribute in her "sketches" to this hero, who lost an arm and a leg in the scrimmage. Then there was Billy, the twelve-year-old drummer-boy, and John, "the manliest man among my forty," says *Nurse Periwinkle*, a sturdy Virginia blacksmith, shot in the back, to whom her heart went out; and many another Tom, Dick, and Harry, legless, armless, and otherwise maimed, looked upon the comely face of *Nurse Periwinkle* and blessed her as she moved from cot to cot.

These tender stories of true life might well touch hearts of stone. A generation ago, perhaps, it was all too fresh in the minds of many, these simple details of suffering and death; but their children, and their children's children, whether from the North or the South, find much of homely beauty in these records; there is no attempt at fine writing, which makes them all the stronger, but a sincere desire to show things as they really were in those sad war days, and surely never up to this time had finer work come from her pen. Perhaps the best of all were her lines on "Thoreau's Flute," composed in

the hospital during the watches of the night, and, as usual, when she put her heart into a thing, it grew in beauty. This good friend of hers had died the May before, truly mourned by the many who knew and loved him. He was a great loss to Concord, among all people and classes, and on the day of his funeral throngs came to show their respect. His coffin was covered with wild flowers, and many beautiful things were said of him by his friends.

After his death, his flute, which he played so sweetly, hung idle in his room, until one summer night a breeze stole through the window into the hollow of the flute, and "Thoreau's Voice" spoke to those who thought it stilled for ever. The strange beauty of the idea took hold of Louisa, and the following exquisite lines show alike how well she loved him, how much she missed him, and how fondly she believed that Nature herself would cherish his memory :

THOREAU'S FLUTE.

We sighing said, "Our Pan is dead ;
His pipe hangs mute beside the river ;
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,
But Music's airy voice is fled.
Spring mourns as for untimely frost ;
The bluebird chants a requiem ;
The willow-blossom waits for him—
The Genius of the wood is lost."

Then from the flute, untouched by hands,
There came a low harmonious breath :
"For such as he there is no death ;—
His life the eternal life commands ;
Above man's aims his nature rose.
The wisdom of a just content
Made one small spot a continent,
And turned to poetry life's prose.

" Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,
Swallow and aster, lake and pine,
To him grew human or divine—
Fit mates for this large-hearted child.
Such homage Nature ne'er forgets,
And yearly on the coverlid
'Neath which her darling lieth hid,
Will write his name in violets.

" To him no vain regrets belong,
Whose soul, that finer instrument,
Gave to the world no poor lament,
But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.
O lonely friend ! he still will be,
A potent presence, though unseen—
Steadfast, sagacious, and serene ;
Seek not for him—he is with thee."

But it was not all sadness at the hospital ; among the convalescents, Louisa's healthful presence and cheery companionship did much to help the long days of waiting for discharge. She had come equipped with games and books for the amusement of her patients—her favourite Dickens among the latter—and there were hilarious times in the old ward when Louisa read aloud or acted some favourite part in her own dashing way. It was certainly characteristic of this young woman of moods that, after breaking her heart and crying her eyes out in one ward, she would rush to her room, bathe her face, smooth her hair, catch up her Dickens, and fly to the other, whence in a few moments her voice rang out and the " boys' " hearty laughter chimed in.

Small wonder, then, that the men adored her, that the nurses deferred to her, that the doctors depended on her, and so eager and enthusiastic was she over her work that she did not recognize when her own strength began to fail. It was for those

around her to notice her lagging step, her loss of sleep and appetite, her feverish activity.

The doctors ordered her off duty, mildly at first, and then commandingly, as advice seemed unheeded. But at last, as she tells us in "Hospital Sketches," *Nurse Periwinkle* surrendered. "I felt," she said, "if I didn't make a masterly retreat very soon, I should tumble down somewhere and have to be borne ignominiously from the field. My head felt like a cannon-ball; my feet had a tendency to cleave to the floor; the walls at times undulated in a most disagreeable manner; people looked unnaturally big; the very bottles on the mantelpiece appeared to dance derisively before my eyes. . . . I resolved to retire gracefully if I must; so with a valedictory to my boys . . . and a fervent wish that I could take off my body and work in my soul, I ascended to my apartment, and *Nurse P.* was reported off duty."

Even then she refused to be put on the sick list, but for days kept up, coughing and heavy-eyed, while a slow, unsubdued fever burned her flesh. The doctors saw her daily, tapped her lungs and shook their heads. At last *Nurse Periwinkle* "gave in." She says: "Hours began to get confused; people looked odd; queer faces haunted the room, and the nights were one long fight with weariness and pain. Letters from home grew anxious; the doctors lifted their eyebrows and nodded ominously; friends said, 'Don't stay,' but the three months were not out, and the idea of giving up so soon was proclaiming a defeat before I was fairly routed; so to all 'Don't stays' I opposed 'I wills,' until

one fine morning a grey-headed gentleman rose like a welcome ghost on my hearth, and at sight of him my resolution melted away, my heart turned traitor to my boys, and when he said, 'Come home,' I answered, 'Yes, Father'; and so ended my career as an army nurse."

Indeed, *Nurse Periwinkle* was dead and buried from that moment, and on her tombstone Louisa carved the following epitaph:

Oh! lay her in a little pit,
With a marble stone to cover it;
And carve thereon a gruel spoon,
To show a "nuss" has died too soon.

She had only a confused idea of what happened afterwards; she remembered saying good-bye to a great many people; rough hands gripped hers gently, voices were broken, eyes were dimmed with tears as she passed out of the hospital. There were some who thought she would not live to get home, but Louisa herself thought nothing about it. Her father was with her, and his quiet serenity was something to be grateful for just now. She was too spent even to wonder how he had been able to pass hostile lines to get to her, as he did, in the very nick of time; but there he was; and she turned to him with a sigh like a little child.

How she got to Boston she never knew; there she had to stay overnight as she was too sick to keep on to Concord, and she had a dreadful time of it at her cousin's, Mr. Sewall's. The next day they got her home somehow, and the last thing she remembered was May's shocked face at the depôt, and her mother's bewildered one at home. The

doctors called her case typhoid pneumonia ; she was delirious for three weeks, while she hovered between life and death, and some of her fancies, though appalling at the time, were amusing for her to recall when the danger was past.

"The most vivid and enduring," she writes, "was the conviction that I had married a stout, handsome Spaniard, dressed in black velvet, with very soft hands, and a voice that was constantly saying : ' Lie still, my dear ! ' This was Mother, I suspect, but with all the comfort I often found in her presence, there was blended an awful fear of the Spanish spouse, who was always coming after me, appearing out of closets, in at windows, or threatening me dreadfully all night long. I appealed to the Pope, and really got up and made a touching plea in something meant for Latin, they tell me. Once I went to Heaven and found it a twilight place, with people darting through the air in a queer way, all very busy and dismal and ordinary. . . . I found it dark and 'slow' and wished I hadn't come. A mob at Baltimore breaking down the door to get me, being hung for a witch, burned, stoned, and otherwise maltreated, were some of my fancies."

When she came to her senses and they told her how ill she had been, she thought it very curious, for she knew nothing of it. "Found a queer, thin, big-eyed face when I looked in the glass," she writes, "didn't know myself at all, and when I tried to walk, discovered that I couldn't, and cried because my legs wouldn't go. . . . Never having been sick before, it was all very new and interesting when I got quiet enough to understand matters. . . . The

old fancies still lingered, seeming so real, I believed in them, and deluded Mother and May with the most absurd stories, so soberly told that they thought them true. Dr. B. came every day and was very kind. Father and Mother were with me night and day, and May sang 'Birks of Aberfeldie' or read to me to while away the tiresome hours."

What Louisa owed to this devoted father and mother there is no telling. Never had parents their children's welfare more wholly and unselfishly at heart, and it is due to them, not only that Louisa pulled through this terrible illness, but her great success as an author was the result of their entire unselfishness throughout her life. Mr. F. B. Sanborn says most truly in his "Life of Amos Bronson Alcott": "Her [Louisa's] success had for its background the whole generous past of her family, . . . for it was only as the historian of the household, the chronicler of their romantic and pathetic story that she could permanently touch the hearts of the public. . . . Nor did she achieve any marked success in her chosen vocation until she turned into cordial fiction the family life and the girlish sentiments and adventures of the four sisters."

So, nursed and coaxed back to life by loving care, Louisa began to mend, and at last crept around like a ghost of herself in caps, for they had cut off her beautiful hair and she mourned for it as truly as *Jo* did, when she sacrificed her chestnut mane for the good of her country. By March, 1863, she began to dust her books, clear out her piece-bags, and make shaky entries in her diary. She recalled and rewrote her lines on "Thoreau's Flute," which Mrs.

Hawthorne showed to Mr. Fields, then editor of the *Atlantic*. He was delighted with them and published them at once. They were much noticed and praised, "also *paid* for," writes Louisa, "and being a mercenary creature, I liked the ten dollars nearly as well as the honour of being 'a new star' and 'a literary celebrity.'"

After the publication of "Thoreau's Flute," which, like all other contributions to the magazine, was presented anonymously, Mr. Alcott chanced to be calling on Longfellow. On the poet's table lay a recent copy of the *Atlantic*. Longfellow opened it and said: "I want to read you Emerson's fine poem on 'Thoreau's Flute.'"

As he began to read Mr. Alcott interrupted him in great delight:

"My daughter Louisa wrote that."

In speaking of this to a friend, Louisa said: "Do you wonder that I felt as proud as a peacock when Father came home and told me?"

On March 28, 1863, Anna's first boy came into the world, and was warmly welcomed by his admiring family. "I wish you could have seen the performance on Saturday evening," writes Louisa, in a letter of congratulation to her sister. "We were all sitting deep in a novel, not expecting Father home owing to the snowstorm, when the door burst open and in he came, all wet and white, waving his bag and calling out: 'Good news! Good news! Anna has a fine boy!' With one accord we opened our mouths and screamed for about two minutes. Then Mother began to cry; I began to laugh; and May to pour out questions; while Papa beamed upon us

all—red, damp, and shiny, the picture of a proud old grandpa. Such a funny evening as we had! Mother kept breaking down, and each time emerged from her handkerchief, saying solemnly: 'I must go right down and see that baby!' Father had told everyone he met, from Mr. Emerson to the coach-driver, and went about the house saying: "Anna's boy! Yes, yes, Anna's boy!" in a mild state of satisfaction."

Louisa and May taxed their brains for a name, and finally decided that Amos Minot Bridge Bronson May Sewall Alcott Pratt would satisfy every branch of the family, and the result was that Frederick Pratt was the name of this important small person, who made such a stir in the waters of life when he rose to the surface. We have since met him many times, for this was the first of Louisa's "Little Men," and *Demi*, she tells us herself, was a faithful portrait of her own sturdy nephew.

She took great delight in him, and sewed for him like his own special slave, rejoicing in her secret soul, no doubt, that he was a boy, for there had been girls enough in the Alcott family.

Louisa spent the spring in getting back her strength. After the strenuous six weeks in Washington, she was content to bask in the sunshine and be glad that she was alive. And after all, there is no spring so beautiful as a spring in Concord. A tangle of wild flowers perfumes the woods, and violets cover the hillsides; the giant trees are lovely in their pale green, backed by the deeper tints of the evergreens; the placid river ripples and sparkles in its joy of living, and whether the sun shines or the gentle rain comes

down through a pearl-grey mist, the world is always lovely at this season, and Louisa "felt as if born again, everything seemed so beautiful and new."

She now began to arrange her hospital letters for publication in the *Commonwealth*, at Mr. Sanborn's suggestion. She made three hospital sketches, which were written in story form. "Hospital Sketches" is all comprised in six chapters. The first two—"Obtaining Supplies" and "A Forward Movement"—are mere explanations of how *Nurse Periwinkle* got to the front. "A Day," "A Night," and "Off Duty" are the story portion of the "Sketches," possibly the three she made at first. The sixth chapter, "A Postscript," she added to please her many readers who cried for more. Letter-writing had come so naturally to her that she did not think much of these; she consented to have them published because she needed the money. Much to her surprise they made a great hit, especially "A Night," into which it was plain she had put her whole heart. Famous people began to write to her about them. Redpath, the publisher, offered to print them all in book form; and here Roberts Brothers first appeared on the scene; they, too, wanted the "Sketches," but Miss Alcott gave the preference to Redpath.

"Short-sighted Louisa!" she adds in her journal, 1877. "Little did you dream that this same Roberts Bros. were to help you make your fortune a few years later. The 'Sketches' never made much money, but showed me 'my style,' and taking the hint I went where glory waited me."

Many good stories were the result of the hospital

experience. Most of them were gathered into the "Camp and Fireside Stories" which were printed later in the same volume with "Hospital Sketches," though each one first appeared in prominent magazines. In October, 1863, she writes in her journal :

" If ever there was an astonished young woman, it is myself, for things have gone on so swimmingly of late, I don't know who I am. A year ago I had no publisher and went begging with my wares ; now *three* have asked me for something. Several papers are ready to print my contributions, and F. B. S. says : " Any publisher this side of Baltimore would be glad to get a book ! ' This is a sudden hoist for a meek and lowly scribbler, who was told to ' stick to her teaching,' and never had a literary friend to lend a helping hand. Fifteen years of hard grubbing may be coming to something after all, and I may yet ' pay all the debts, fix the house, and send May to Italy, and keep the old folks cosy,' as I've said I would so long, yet so hopelessly."

Indeed, her dream was beginning to take shape. Already she was giving May drawing lessons in anatomy and fitting her out with pretty clothes, for she was very proud of her handsome, talented sister, and was determined that she should wear nothing odd or out of taste if she could help it. Poor May, being the youngest, had been forced many a time to wear " handed-down " things, and Louisa has given a clever sketch of what agonies the artist soul went through in her description of *Amy's* woes in " Little Women."

The New Year of 1864 dawned bright with promise.

Redpath, who scented a fortune in the young authoress, heard of "Moods," and came hurrying to Concord to secure it for publication, so the dear "first-born" was taken out again, chopped and pruned and sawed and hacked, but to no purpose; poor "Moods" seemed to be a black sheep, a ne'er-do-weel in the family. Once more she put it on the shelf and went back to her short stories; the "blood-and-thunder" sort pleased best and the money they brought was very comforting. Some months later she wrote several chapters of "Work," getting along very well, when one night as she lay awake, an idea about shortening "Moods" popped into her head and she had no more sleep. The early morning saw her hard at work, and for two weeks after she "hardly ate, slept, or stirred, but wrote, wrote like a thinking-machine in full operation. When it was all rewritten, without copying, I found it much improved, though I had taken out ten chapters and sacrificed many of my favourite things."

However, through her friend, Mrs. D., she got a reading from A. K. Loring, the publisher, and one day as she sat on the floor putting down the parlour carpet, she received an enthusiastic letter from the publisher praising the book and promising to bring it out at once. The Alcott family immediately had a "rapture," and Louisa finished her work "double quick," regardless of weariness, toothache, or "blue devils."

So with the end of the old year, 1864, "Moods" was at length cast upon the world. It came out on Christmas Eve, but it never was a luck child.

It brought her much care, a bit of a heartache, sleepless night, wearing days, but rich experience, for she learned, after many trials, that truth in its simplest form is after all one's highest goal, and her efforts from that time on reached upward toward its unwavering light.

CHAPTER X

RECREATION AND A TRIP ABROAD

AFTER "Moods" was well off her mind, Louisa felt better and presented the volume to her mother on her sixty-fourth birthday with this inscription: "To Mother, my earliest patron, kindest critic, dearest reader, I gratefully and affectionately inscribe my first romance." She began to get a little more notice than she found quite comfortable; her friends' admiration was very precious to her, but when strangers invaded the premises and demanded to see the authoress, she turned thorny. "Admire the books, but let the woman alone, if you please, dear public!" she wails in her journal. But this was only a foretaste of what she suffered in the years which followed.

In spite of her success, money was still a rare and beautiful thing, and Louisa sent her "pot-boilers" a-fishing for it as often as ever, with, it must be owned, far greater success. The heads of the Alcott family being now above water, Louisa was fired on one special occasion with a praiseworthy desire to adorn them with bonnets; her inventive mind found an outlet here as well as in story-writing, and the styles in the early sixties being very pronounced and highly coloured, this

ambitious milliner could give rein to her vivid imagination.

"My Lass," she writes to Anna, in a burst of sisterly confidence, "this must be a frivolous and dressy letter, because you always want to know about our clothes, and we've been at it lately. May's bonnet is a sight for gods and men. Black and white outside, with a great cockade boiling over the front, to meet a red ditto surging from the interior, where a red rainbow darts across the brow, and a surf of white lace foams up on each side. I expect to hear that you and John fell flat in the dust with horror on beholding it. *My* bonnet has nearly been the death of me; for thinking some angel might make it possible for me to go to the mountains, I felt a wish for a tidy hat, after wearing an old one till it fell in tatters from my brow. Mrs. P. promised a bit of grey silk and I built on that; but when I went for it I found my hat was built on sand, for she let me down with a crash, saying she wanted the silk herself, and kindly offering me a flannel petticoat instead. I was in woe for a spell, having one dollar in the world and scorning debt even for that prop of life—a 'bonnet.' Then I roused myself, flew to Dodge, demanded her cheapest bonnet, found one for a dollar, took it, and went home wondering if the sky would open and drop me a trimming. I am simple in my tastes, but a naked straw bonnet is a little too severely chaste even for me. Sky did not open; so I went to the 'Widow Cruise's oil bottle,' my ribbon-box, which, by the way, is the eighth wonder of the world, for nothing is ever put in, yet I always find

some old dud when all other hopes fail. From this salvation bin I extracted the remains of the old white ribbon (used up as I thought two years ago) and the bits of black lace that have adorned a long line of departed hats. Of the lace I made a dish on which I thriftily served up bows of ribbon, like meat on toast. Inside I put the lace bow which adorns my form anywhere when needed. A white flower A. H. gave me, sat airily on the brim—fearfully unbecoming but pretty in itself and in keeping. Strings are yet to be evolved from chaos. I feel that they await me somewhere in the dim future. Green ones *pro tem*. hold this wonder of the age upon my gifted brow, and I survey my hat with respectful awe. I trust you will also, and see in it another great example of the power of mind over matter, and the convenience of a colossal brain in the primeval wrestle with the unruly atoms which have harassed the feminine soul ever since Eve clapped on a modest fig-leaf and did up her hair with a thorn for a hairpin.”

This letter was written from Concord and showed Louisa in one of her restless moods. The quiet place with its dull routine of housework was very trying at times. For days she would battle with her “discontented mind,” then a wild fit of energy would possess her, as on the day she did a big wash alone, baked, swept the house, picked the hops, got dinner, and wrote a chapter on “Moods,” which would clear her sky wonderfully, though such energetic measures were constantly breaking her down. When there was work to be done, Louisa went at it with all her old vigour, forgetting that her hospital

experiences had impaired her strength, remembering this fact only at those times when she was "laid up for repairs."

She was beginning to be genuinely tired of her "sensational rubbish," as she called the money-making "pot-boilers." There was something better to do with her gift of writing, if she could only strike out in the right direction. Her work was now carefully considered wherever she sent it, and she had a feeling always in her very earnest young soul that she would like to help the world in some small way, and send a little sunshine into the dark corners. The unexpected reception of her "Hospital Sketches" had the effect of spurring her on, and the birth of "Our Young Folks," a Boston publication, which in 1873 was bought by the "St. Nicholas Magazine," the rising juvenile periodical of America, turned her thoughts finally in the right direction. She was asked to contribute stories, and her ever-ready mind jumped easily to the fairy tales which had been her delight when she was younger. "Nellie's Hospital" was written at this time and was so much liked that many old tales and poems were dug up from the past, and Louisa let her lovers languish while she turned her attention to the children. Her "grown-up" stories were still eagerly called for and paid for. "An Hour" found a lodging in the *Commonwealth*. "Mrs. Todger's Teapot" was another excellent bit of work, a Christmas story of 1864. "Moods" sold very quickly at first, and brought her fame, recognition, and some money. In December, 1864, Nathaniel Hawthorne's death cast a gloom over the life at Concord. This quiet,

shy scholar was much loved in his small circle, and it was his loss, added to her own restlessness, which made Louisa long for flight.

The New Year of 1865 saw the war drawing to a close. Louisa's deep interest in the cause had not died out, but her health never allowed her to try hospital work again. She sewed zealously for the soldiers, attended meetings in their behalf, and on one occasion she dramatized six scenes from Dickens for a Benefit Fair in Boston. She took part and worked with all her might, clearing twenty-five hundred dollars for the fund. There were dances, fairs, masquerades, and teas given in Concord for the Soldiers' Aid Society, in all of which she took an eager interest.

Acting was then, as always, a pure delight to her, and these war times called for her services. The scenes from Dickens grew very popular, and her work in that line was always brilliant, because she loved it and threw herself into it heart and soul. On April 2nd, Richmond fell, and on the 15th, in the midst of the rejoicing, came the news of Lincoln's assassination, and she joined in the nation's mourning. After that, life glided very placidly, too placidly for restless Louisa, until June 24th, when another little nephew put new life and interest into the family. Coming as he did on Elizabeth's birthday, he seemed to fill a void in their hearts. He was specially dear to Louisa, whose memory of her sister needed just such living comfort as little John could give. But the dreadful dullness weighed upon her. "Nothing stirring but the wind," she writes; "nothing to see but dust; no one comes but

rose-bugs, so I grub and scold at the A., because it takes a poor fellow's tales and keeps 'em for years without paying for 'em. If I think of my woes, I fall into a vortex of debts, dish-pans, and despondency awful to see. So I say 'every path has its puddle' and try to play gaily with the tadpoles in *my* puddle, while I wait for the Lord to give me a lift, or some gallant Raleigh to spread his velvet cloak and fetch me over dry-shod."

She longed for the mountains as she longed for anything that would change the monotony, and many a dismal mood was worked off in her favourite hiding-place—the old garret. In fancy we can see her curled up on the old discarded lounge, gazing disconsolately at the falling summer rain as it splashed on the leaves of the giant trees that looked in at the windows, or pattered on the roof. It was doubtless on some such day that she wrote the poem which we find in "Little Women," with many improvements and additions.

Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust and worn by time,
All fashioned and filled long ago
By children now in their prime.
Four little keys hung side by side,
With faded ribbons, brave and gay
When fastened there with childish pride,
Long ago on a rainy day.
Four little names, one on each lid,
Carved out by a boyish hand ;
And underneath there lieth hid,
Histories of the happy band
Once playing here and pausing oft
To hear the sweet refrain,
That came and went on the roof aloft,
In the falling summer rain.

.

Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust and worn by time :
Four women, taught by weal and woe
To love and labour in their prime ;
Four sisters parted for an hour—
None lost, one only gone before,
Made by love's immortal power,
Nearest and dearest evermore.
Oh ! when these hidden stores of ours
Lie open to the Father's sight,
May they be rich in golden hours—
Deeds that show fairer for the light,
Deeds whose brave music long shall ring,
Like a spirit-stirring strain,
Souls that shall gladly soar and sing
In the long sunshine, after rain.

She had not to wait much longer for the lift she needed, for she writes : " Mr. W., hearing that I was something of a nurse and wanted to travel, proposed my going with his invalid daughter. I agreed, though I had my doubts. But every one said ' Go,' and so after a week of worry I *did* go."

They sailed July 19th for Liverpool, and here shone for Louisa the new light which was to guide her literary life. It was a ten days' voyage, and possibly not such a pleasant one as on the ocean liners of to-day, with all their comfort and magnificence. She was not sick, only " uncomfortable " as she expressed it, but she enjoyed the ever-changing sea, the fine sunsets, even the sunrises, for being an enterprising young woman, we may be sure, she was up early. There were fogs, and icebergs, rain-storms and summer calms, all of which were most interesting and instructive, but she was glad to get to Liverpool, on solid earth again, then on to London.

Of this first trip abroad she has left but a fragmentary record ; a few jottings in her journal and a few facts scattered here and there among her stories. The account in "Little Women" of *Amy's* trip abroad is certainly her own experience, with the "story" part left out ; but we glean from her journal that the "four dull, drizzling days" spent in London were most depressing. She went to the parks, Westminster Abbey, and the famous streets she had read about in English novels. From London they went to Dover, then by steamer to Ostend. Louisa was ill all the way, and "saw nothing but a basin." Here they rested two days, enjoying their first glimpse of foreign life and fashion. A peep at Brussels made her wish for more, but the invalid's destination was Schwalbach, where she meant to take the baths, so their journey across country was somewhat hurried.

Miss Alcott writes in her journal : "On the 12th [of August] began a lovely voyage up the Rhine. It was too beautiful to describe, so I shall not try ; but I feel richer and better for that memorable day. We reached Coblenz at sunset, and I was up half the night enjoying the splendid view of the fortress opposite the moonlit river with its bridges of boats, and troops crossing at midnight.

"A second day, still more charming, took us through the famous parts of the Rhine, and filled my head with pictures that will last all my life."

There is no telling what this year of travel meant to Louisa, coming as it did when her mind cried out for a change of some sort. Her beauty-loving nature craved something more than quiet Concord

and its surroundings, and this progress through the Rhine country, with its legends and folk tales, was the very best tonic for her.

They passed through a number of queer little villages before reaching Schwalbach, where they rested a month and took the baths, and when the invalid got a little stronger they went to Vevéy, of which we hear so much in "Little Women." On the way they stopped at Wiesbaden, then at Frankfort.

"Here I saw and enjoyed a good deal," she writes. "The statues of Goethe, Schiller, Faust, Gutenberg, and Schaeffer are in the squares. Goethe's house is a tall, plain building, with each storey projecting over the lower, and a Dutch roof; a marble slab over the front door recording the date of Goethe's birth. I took a look at it, and wanted to go in, as it was empty, but there was no time. Some Americans said: 'Who was Goethe to fuss about?'"

This to Louisa, who as a girl, had worshipped him and Emerson! She was enthusiastic over Heidelberg, and gives us pretty pen pictures of the charming old place, surrounded by mountains. From Heidelberg to Baden-Baden, Freiberg, Basle, and on the way to Berne she caught her first glimpse of the Alps, on her mother's birthday, October 8th.

"Tall, white, spectral shapes they were, towering above the green hills and valleys that lay between. Clouds half hid them, and the sun glittered on the everlasting snow that lay on their tops. Sharp, strange outlines against the sky they became as night came on, and in the morning I had a fine view of the Jungfrau, the Blümis, the Wetterhorn, and Mönch from the terrace at Berne."

From Berne they went to Freiberg No. 2, a most romantic spot, with its winding river, suspension bridges, steep hills, and watch towers. The next stop was in Lausanne, and finally they reached Vevéy, having enjoyed a fine panorama of this wonderful little Switzerland.

At Vevéy there came to Louisa a pleasant experience, something very sweet and beautiful in the way of friendship between a grown woman and a fine young fellow, which she has generously shared with a world of young readers. The boy in question was named Ladislas Wisniewski—"two hiccoughs and a sneeze will give you the name perfectly," she tells us, but she called him Laddie most of the time, and often *Laurie*, the name we have grown to love so much in "Little Women."

He was a young Polish boy who had come to Vevéy for his health, a tall, thin lad of eighteen or twenty, with an intelligent face and charming manners. Louisa's heart warmed to him at first because he looked delicate. He had come to board in their *pension*, and the acquaintance began at the breakfast table, by a cough and a shiver. Louisa, full of sympathy, looked up quickly—he was sitting directly in a draught—while she, on the opposite side of the table, was roasting by the stove. She spoke to their landlady between meals, and at dinner their places were changed. The young stranger was quick to appreciate the kindness, and from that time the friendship grew. He could speak only broken English, but her friendly interest drew him out of his shell, and Louisa, so lately from scenes of war, found that he had been in the

late Polish Revolution, had suffered imprisonment and hardship, losing friends, fortune, and health, for his lungs were in a bad state, but he was fighting bravely for life.

All the pent-up tenderness and romance broke forth in Louisa's affection for this boy. Sternly she had dubbed herself an "old maid" from the mature age of twenty-five to the venerable state of thirty-three years. Yet no woman was ever more ardently beloved by her many boy admirers, and this one in particular was so open in his adoration that Louisa was both proud and touched. Had she been ten years younger and he ten years older, the flavour of romance might have been even stronger; as it was, she played mother to him, and he called her his "little mamma" and made her his confidante. He asked her to call him "Varjo," as his mother did, and taught her French in return for her lessons in English. He played beautifully on the piano, and many a concert they had in the salon of the *pension*. He brought her flowers—late roses were blooming in Vevéy—and there was always a bouquet ready for her at dinner.

She celebrated her thirty-third birthday at Vevéy, and wrote in her journal: "A. gave me a pretty painting of Chillon, Ladislav promised me the notes of the Polish National Hymn, and played me his sweetest airs as a present, after wishing me 'all good and happiness on earth and a high place in Heaven as my reward.' It was a mild, windy day, very like me in its fitful changes of sunshine and shade. Usually I am sad on my birthday, but not this time; for, though nothing very pleasant

happened, I was happy and hopeful, and enjoyed everything with unusual relish. I feel rather old with my thirty-three years, but have much to keep me young, and hope I shall not grow older in heart as the time goes on."

In December she adds: "Laurie very interesting and good. Pleasant walks and talks with him in the chateau garden and about Vev y. A lovely sail on the lake and much fun giving English and receiving French lessons."

In the first volume of "Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag" Miss Alcott devotes several pages of "My Boys" to this favourite boy of hers. "Lake Leman," she writes, "will never seem so lovely again as when Laddie and I roamed about its shores, floated on its bosom, or laid splendid plans for the future in the sunny garden of the chateau. I tried it again last year (1871), but the charm was gone, for I missed my boy, with his fun, his music, and the frank, fresh affection he gave his 'little mamma,' as he insisted on calling the lofty spinster, who loved him like half-a-dozen grandmothers rolled into one."

She kept many mementoes of him—some December roses and a pile of merry little notes, which she used to find tucked under her door. Better than all, she has made him live through time, and—but that is another chapter.

Those few delightful weeks in Vev y drew to an end, and the travellers turned their faces to Nice, after an affecting parting from Laddie. Louisa hoped to meet him in Paris in the spring, but it was only a faint hope, for neither of them thought he

would live through the winter. When they said "good-bye," which they tried to make *au revoir*, she tells us: "There were tears in my boy's eyes and a choke in the voice that tried to say cheerfully: '*Bon voyage*, dear and good little mamma. I do not say *adieu*, but *au revoir*.'

"Then the carriage rolled away, the wistful face vanished, and nothing remained to me but the memory of Laddie and a little stain on my glove where a drop had fallen."

The stay in Nice is vividly described by *Our Foreign Correspondent* in "Little Women"—even the ball they went to at the *pension* where they boarded for a while. But they were lonely among so many foreigners from every part of the world, and finally tried housekeeping in an apartment, kept by one Madam Rolande, who for six years had been French governess to Queen Victoria's children. Here they were more comfortable; they had a jewel of a French maid and six nice, large rooms.

There were beautiful drives about Nice and many sights to see. Here also was the lovely *Valrosa*, a villa in a rose garden, a dear old landmark of "Little Women." Indeed, Louisa popped the whole of this trip, plump and pat, into volume second.

But at Nice she decided to start for home in May. Fond as she was of her invalid friend, she longed for a few weeks of absolute freedom, and on the first day of May started off for Paris, as happy as a released prisoner.

To her great delight, at the station, waving his cap among the crowd, was Laddie, who took charge of her from that time until the day she left for

London, and she says in "My Boys": "Next day began the pleasantest fortnight in all my year of travel. Laddie appeared early, elegant to behold in a new hat and buff gloves, and was immensely amused because the servant informed me that my big son had arrived."

They went shopping together, even to the milliner's—Louisa's extravagances always ran to bonnets—where he placed his good French at her disposal. He was full of fun and up to all sorts of mischief. For instance, he made her call him *ma drogha*, saying it meant "my friend" in Polish. He introduced her to several young fellows of his own age, and she used the words before them innocently enough; they flew into such a gale of merriment that she inquired the cause, and found that she had been calling her Laddie "my darling" in the most loving manner. Of course, being an old and proper spinster, she turned the colour of a peony as she joined in the laugh at her expense.

There was a very sober side to this boy of hers; a pathetic and hopeless little love story of two innocent hearts parted by stern parents, and this, too, he confided to the "little mamma," who loved him all the more for this shadow. The two weeks went all too quickly, the farewells had to come at last.

"This time it is for always," said Laddie; "so as a parting souvenir, give to me the sweet English good-bye."

"As he said this, with a despairing sort of look, as if he could not spare even so humble a friend as myself, my heart was quite rent within me, and,

regardless of several prim English ladies, I drew down his tall head and kissed him tenderly, feeling that in this world there were no more meetings for us. Then I ran away and buried myself in an empty railway carriage, hugging the little cologne bottle he had given me."

Laddie wrote to her regularly for several years, and later sent his photograph with a few lines, but though she acknowledged it, she did not hear from him for so long that she feared this last and dearest of her boys was dead. She concludes the little story in this way :

"It is hardly necessary to add, for the satisfaction of inquisitive little women, that Laddie was the original of *Laurie*, as far as a pale pen-and-ink sketch could embody a living, loving boy."

She was anxious to get home, and hurried from Paris to London, where she went about a great deal, seeing sights and people, going to theatres, dinner parties, concerts, and receptions ; she heard her beloved Dickens read, and received whole-souled English kindness from every one.

Early in June, she spent ten days in a real English country house, which she greatly enjoyed. On the 11th she went to board with a Mrs. Travers in Westbourne Grove Terrace. The household consisted of "Mrs. T. and daughter, two sisters from Dublin, and ten young men, barristers, clerks, ministers, and students. . . . Very free and jolly, roaming about London all day, dining late, and resting, chatting, music, or fun in the evening."

That she saw everything that was to be seen, we learn from the following paragraph : "Saw the

Tower, Windsor, parks, gardens, and all manner of haunts of famous men and women ; Milton's house, Johnson's, in Ball Court ; Lamb's, Sairy Gamp's, Saracen's Head, the Charter House, where Thackeray was when a lad ; Furnival's Inn, where Dickens wrote " Pickwick " ; Bacon's Walk, and endless memorable sights. St. Paul's I liked better than Notre Dame."

While in London, she saw Routledge about " Moods " ; he not only took it, but asked for another book, much to her delight. Truth to tell, the last two months of her stay abroad was the period she most enjoyed. In the first place, she had no care nor responsibility ; in the second, she was given this freedom through the unselfishness of her mother, who borrowed money for the family support, that Louisa might have enough of her own to finish the year's vacation. This was among the debts that the faithful daughter repaid, and surely this journey, of all others, was the golden key which opened the way. She left for Liverpool and home July 7th, and after a stormy voyage of fourteen days reached home at last, glad to be there, glad to see them all, feeling rested and improved in every way.

The year had wrought many changes among those she loved. She found her mother looking worn and sick and tired, which troubled her greatly ; her father, placid as ever ; Anna, happy in her home, with two bonnie boys ; and May, radiant and full of plans and hopes.

In August, she fell to work once more on her stories, for orders in plenty awaited her, and the

family coffers were nearly empty. In September, poor Mrs. Alcott broke down completely ; the year's strain had been too much for her. Then Louisa "turned in," nursing by day and writing by night. By November, Mrs. Alcott was slowly mending, and Louisa writes : " I never expect to see the strong, energetic ' Marmee ' of old times, but, thank the Lord ! she is still here, though pale and weak, quiet and sad ; all her fine hair gone, and face full of wrinkles, bowed back, and every sign of age. Life has been so hard for her, and she so brave, so glad to spend herself for others. Now we must live for her."

And from that moment Louisa did—all her energy, all the best that was in her, bent to the service. In the long, fruitful years which followed, her dream came true, and " Marmee " had her sunny corner, her easy-chair, and the rest she had earned so nobly.

CHAPTER XI

"LITTLE WOMEN"

THE next year (1867) was spent by Louisa in making up for lost time and getting her "thinking cap" pinned on properly. Fortunately, many people wanted stories, and, as the family treasury was in a bad way, she set to work in earnest. Her time was taken up in caring for her mother, writing her stories, and keeping house. Her writing alone would have kept her busy enough, but her other cares told on her health, and so, after a year of hard labour to pay for the long vacation, she ran off to Clark's Island for a holiday during the month of August. She came back in September, bright and full of her old energy, after a jolly fortnight, and we find this trifling entry in her journal :

"September, 1867. Niles, partner of Roberts, asked me to write a girls' book. Said I'd try. F. asked me to be the editor of *Merry's Museum*. Said I'd try. Began at once on both new jobs, but didn't like either."

It was in this fashion that she treated a proposition which was to hold so much for her in the future. Of the two jobs, being editor of *Merry's Museum* meant more to her just then. She was to read manuscripts, write one story each month, also

an editorial, for five hundred dollars a year.. Quite joyful over the prospect of a settled income, she decided to take a room in Boston for the winter and set up housekeeping for herself.

" Cannot keep well in Concord," she writes in October, " so must try Boston, and not work too hard."

" On the 28th rode to B., on my load of furniture, with Fred, feeling as if I was going to camp out in a new country ; hoped it would prove a hospitable, healthy land."

Those who have read " An Old-Fashioned Girl " will remember that when *Polly* came to town to teach music, she did very much the same thing.

" You ought to have seen my triumphal entry into the city," she tells her friend *Fanny Shaw*, " sitting among my goods and chattels, in a farmer's cart, . . . on my little sofa, with boxes and bundles all around me, a birdcage on one side, a fishing basket with a kitten's head popping in and out of the hole, on the other side, and jolly old Mr. Brown, in his blue frock, perched on a keg of apples, in front."

She gives a very lively description of this ride, and the adventures of a certain squash pie, the gift of a neighbour, are faithfully recorded. Louisa was always ready for a " lark," and this novel way of moving from Concord to Boston was an idea after her own heart. The furniture received many bumps and scrapes in the jolting waggon ; the book shelves tumbled on their heads as they went down one hill, the rocking-chair slid off into the middle of the road as they creaked up another ; but it was a

jolly trip, and Louisa, who never did things quite like other people, enjoyed the fun immensely.

Not that she was ever odd, but she was, like *Polly*, delightfully old-fashioned at times, and even at the sedate age of four-and-thirty could frolic like a girl. She set to work very much as *Polly* did with her simple housekeeping, and no doubt enjoyed it even more, for Louisa was now a young woman of some position in her world, while *Polly*, the modest little music-teacher, was quite unknown, save among her few friends. Her simple housekeeping, in her sunny room, was quite as interesting as in *Polly's* small establishment, and many a happy twilight was spent round her cheerful blaze, while she dispensed tea and buttered toast and made merry with her guests—her “hundred or more” cousins—who adored her.

The winter in Boston passed happily, for May had a drawing-class in her room every day, so she was never lonely, and, as she was constantly called upon to act for charity, she had a very good time, for the old passion never quite died out. Dickens was always her delight, and “Mrs. Jarley’s Wax Works” her special property. She gave it many times in public with much success. She worked faithfully as the editor of *Merry’s Museum*, and sold her short stories as fast as she wrote them.

“Things look promising,” she wrote to her mother in January, 1868. “. . . I am pretty well, and keep so busy I haven’t time to be sick. Everyone is very polite to me, and I often think, as I go larking around, independent, with more work than I can do and half a dozen publishers asking for tales, of the

old times when I went meekly from door to door peddling my first poor little stories, and feeling so rich with ten dollars. . . .

"It's clear that Minerva Moody is getting on, and, by the time she's a used-up old lady of seventy or so, she may finish her job and see her family well off. . . .

"Keep all the money I send ; pay up every bill ; get comforts and enjoy yourselves. Let's be merry while we may, and lay up a bit for a rainy day.

"With which gem from Aristotle, I am, honoured madam, your dutiful and affectionate

"L. M. ALCOTT.

"Regards to Plato. Doesn't he want new socks ? Are his clothes getting shiny ? "

January began most happily ; there was certainly something in the air that breathed of hope.

"For many years we have not been so comfortable," she says in her journal. "May and I both earning, Anna with her good John to lean on, and the old people in a cosy home of our own. . . . To-day my first hyacinth bloomed, white and sweet—a good omen ; a little flag of truce, perhaps, from the enemies we have been fighting all these years. Perhaps we are to win, after all, and conquer poverty, neglect, pain, and debt, and march on, with flags flying, into the new world with the New Year."

Still no sign of the promised story for girls. After the first trial it was evidently laid away and forgotten in the press of other work, and a multitude of social duties, both pleasant and profitable.

"My second hyacinth bloomed pale blue, like a

timid hope," she writes on January 24th, "and I took the omen for a good one, as I *am* getting on, and have more than I can do of the work that I once went begging for. Enjoyed the little spring my little flower made for me, and Buzzy, my pet fly, moved into the sweet mansion from his hanging garden in the ivy pot."

Her third hyacinth bloomed a beautiful pink on the 14th of February, Valentine's Day, and, as flowers always spoke to her in a sweet language of their own, she began the saint's day happily in her snug little room. She wrote her stories, made some shirts for her little nephews, and finally went out to buy a squash pie for her supper—it seems she had a passion for squash pies. But she was feeling tired and cross when, hugging her pie, she trudged home at dusk. It was snowing and very cold, and the pie turned a somersault, much to the amusement of a small boy and Miss Alcott herself, whose spirits rose at once. Arriving at home, she found her Valentine in the shape of a gentleman waiting for her on her doorstep.

"I took him up my winding stair," writes this ambitious young spider, "and found him a very delightful fly, for he handed me a letter out of which fell a hundred-dollar bill. With this bait, Mr. B. lured me to write 'one column of advice to young women.' . . . If he had asked me to write a Greek oration, I would have said 'Yes.' So I gave a receipt, and the very elegant agent bowed himself away, leaving my 'umble' bower full of perfume and my soul of peace. . . . I planned my article while I ate my dilapidated pie, and then

proceeded to write it—with the bill before me. It was about old maids. 'Happy Women' was the title, and I put in my list all the busy, useful, independent spinsters I know, for liberty is a better husband than love—to many of us. This was a nice little episode in my trials of an authoress, so I record it.

"So the pink hyacinth was a true prophet, and I went to bed a happy millionaire, to dream of flannel petticoats for my blessed Mother, paper for Father, a new dress for May, and sleds for my boys."

Had Louisa lived among us to-day, she would hardly have called herself an old maid at thirty-five. The athletic young woman of our time has just "got her growth" at that age. But, for all her love of boys, romance had never touched her very closely. She loved to see it in others and to write about it. She delighted in her sister's happy marriage, but would have none of it herself, though she played mother to the little lads in her best style, and sister, and even grandmother, to other boys, older still. The "mother feeling" of taking care of people was very strong in her; she was devotion itself to her sister Anna, whose growing deafness made her somewhat dependent. She writes in her journal:

"To Nan's in P. M. to take care of her while the papa and Freddie went to Concord. The dear little man, so happy and important, with his bit of a bag, six pennies, and cake for refreshment during the long journey of an hour. We brooded over Johnnie as if he were a heavenly sort of fire to warm and comfort us with his sunny little face and

loving ways. She is a happy woman! I sell *my* children, and, though they feed me, they don't love me as hers do. Little Tranquillity played alone all day, and made a pretty picture sitting in 'marmar's' lap in his nightgown, talking through the trumpet to her. She never heard his sweet little voice in any other way. Poor Nan!"

So the winter passed and the spring came, and still no girls' book. She had been at home since the end of February, having enjoyed the few months' rest in Boston, and, as usual, was finding it hard to write stories fast enough to please the publishers. In May, she sent her father to see Mr. Niles about a fairy book she proposed writing, but the stern publisher would have none of it.

"A girls' book," he demanded, "and the sooner it is written the better."

So, with a helpless shrug of her shoulders, Louisa set to work on "Little Women."

"Marmee, Anna, and May all approve my plan," she writes. "So I plod away, though I don't enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters; but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it."

"Good joke," writes Louisa, on looking over her journal many years later. She started writing in May, and by June had finished a dozen chapters. We can imagine her, as we have seen *Jo* herself in "Little Women," perched upon a high chair before an old-fashioned desk, with the light from her dormer window streaming full upon her paper, scratching away busily. We all remember the black pinafore and the cap with the rampant red bow.

The hours flew by unheeded while Louisa dipped far back into her childhood, and was a child again, with *Meg*, *Jo*, *Beth*, and *Amy*. And yet, when she sent these first twelve chapters to Mr. Niles, he called them *dull*, and she quite agreed with him.

Think of the first chapters of " Little Women," brimming over with the doings of these four wholesome little girls, being thought dull by these foolish " grown-ups "—the publisher and the author ! And the next chapter, the Christmas frolic and the " Witch's Curse," in all its dramatic glory, with *Jo* as the hero and the villain and all the other male parts she could whisk into at a moment's notice, and *Meg* as the witch, and *Beth* and *Amy* playing the smaller parts as best they could—this was called dull, too, by these shortsighted people. And all the other simple, wholesome, interesting chapters fared no better. But, in spite of their misgivings, Louisa decided to keep on and try the experiment, " for lively, simple books are very much needed for girls, and perhaps I can supply the need."

On July 15th, she finished the first volume of " Little Women," never indeed having any notion of writing another part, and she thankfully laid down her pen, for the strain had been great. On the same day she writes in her journal : " Have finished ' Little Women ' and sent it off—402 pages. May is designing some pictures for it. Hope it will go, for I shall probably get nothing for ' Morning Glories.' "

With the completed manuscript in his hands, Mr. Niles wisely decided not to trust his own judgment, and looked around for an abler critic. This

he found in a small niece, and he left her curled up in a big armchair, with the closely written pages of "Little Women" in her eager hands. He peeped in every once in a while, but he did not disturb her, for the little girl was absorbed, forgetful of everything but the story, sometimes laughing aloud, sometimes stopping to brush the tears away, but never lifting her eyes from these fascinating pages until the last was laid down with a sigh of regret. She was an enthusiastic young person, and had nothing but praise for the story. Mr. Niles hesitated no longer. In August, Louisa writes :

"Roberts Brothers made me an offer for the story, but at the same time advised me to keep the copyright ; so I shall."

Nearly twenty years later she adds : "An honest publisher and a lucky author, for the copyright made her fortune, and the 'dull book' was the first golden egg of the ugly duckling."

So the book was published, and Louisa jumped at once to the top of Fame's ladder, where she remained always in the world of children. No writer before or since her time has bequeathed such a goodly heritage to girls. From the moment we encounter *Jo*, stretched on the hearth rug, until we take leave of her under the apple trees at Plumfield, fifteen years later, the light of her busy, useful life sheds happiness on all who read of her.

What is there, after all, in the book which has held so many generations of readers under a magic spell ? It is but a simple story of simple girls, bound by a beautiful tie of family love, that neither poverty, sorrow, nor death could sever. Four little

pilgrims, struggling onward and upward through all the difficulties that beset them on their way ; that is all—just the story of their lives—their daily struggles, their joys, and their sorrows ; but what girl among the millions who have pored over the book could read of them unmoved ? How many ambitions have been spurred on by *Jo's* struggles and difficulties and by *Amy's* artistic efforts ! How many little " Crickets on the Hearth " have chirped the sweeter for dear little *Beth's* sunny influence ! How many homes have been made the happier by the " Megs " who have graced them ! And they were not always turtle doves, like the good little story-book children. *Jo* and *Amy*, the two high tempers of the family, had many a squabble, and " Little Women " records probably the most serious quarrel of their young lives in the chapter where " *Jo* meets Apollyon."

One little girl clearly remembers her feelings over that dreadful affair, and, though she is grown now, the problem of twenty years ago still confronts her. Who was the greater sinner—*Amy*, for destroying her sister's book, or *Jo*, for not warning *Amy* that the ice on the river was thin ? " Never let the sun go down upon your anger," said *Mrs. March*, as they went to bed the night of the quarrel, yet rebellious *Jo* could not forgive. For years this same little girl took this wholesome advice as her guiding star for her own unruly spirit.

Louisa was not prepared for the storm of applause her book called forth. Tucked away in her modest corner of Concord, she looked on in wonder as edition after edition was printed to supply the

demand, and the hitherto empty coffers of the Alcott family began to "swell wisely," as her favourite *Sam Weller* might have said. Great excitement reigned among the children, who regarded the author of "Little Women" as their own special property. Though written for girls, there was enough boy material to suit everyone, and it was soon very plain that the mere suggestion of a love story attracted the youngsters more than any other part of the book. They demanded a sequel. They wanted to go to *Meg's* wedding, to see *Jo* and *Beth* and *Amy* grow up, with lovers of their own; to see *Jo*, in particular, married to their favourite *Laurie*; but here the much-enduring author balked. She wrote in her journal on October 30, 1868:

"Mr. Niles wants a second volume for spring. Pleasant notices and letters arrive, and much interest in my 'little women,' who seem to find friends by their truth to life, as I hoped.

"November 1st. Began the second part of 'Little Women.' I can do a chapter a day, and in a month I mean to be done. A little success is so inspiring that I now find my *Marches* sober, nice people, and, as I can launch into the future, my fancy has more play. Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life. *I won't marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone.*"

Louisa always turned thorny over the "loving" parts, but as the children clamoured for a proper pairing-off of the *March* girls, she was forced to give in, and the result was an interweaving of wholesome romance into this fine story of home

life. There was a touch of sympathetic fingers about the heartstrings of these little women, but in spite of tears and entreaties, *Jo* turned a deaf ear to poor *Laurie's* wooing.

Imploring letters poured in upon her, and the children were heartbroken ; in some instances they were made ill by grief and excitement, until at last Miss Alcott was forced to find some kind of a lover for her *Jo*, whom she had destined to be a jolly old maid. So *Professor Bhaer* came upon the scene, and soon won his way into the warm regard of the young readers. We like him better, perhaps, in " Little Men " and " Jo's Boys," where there is not such a striking contrast between the polished Laurie and the gruff though kindly German. The children were mollified if not wholly satisfied, and the author thereafter was left in peace on that subject. But she was no longer a private person, for every girl who had read her book claimed her friendship.

Her thirty-sixth birthday she spent alone, writing hard ; she was in a vortex, stopping neither to eat nor to sleep, and being in Boston at that time, there were no interruptions. In December, she went back to Concord to shut up the house for the winter. " A cold, hard, dirty time," she writes, " but was so glad to be out of Concord that I worked like a beaver, and turned the key on *Apple Slump* with joy."

She was worried about her mother, whose health was breaking, and she thought a winter with Anna and the boys, sturdy lads of six and four, would benefit her greatly. " I feel as if the decline had begun for her," she says, " and each year

will add to the change which is going on, as time alters the energetic, enthusiastic home mother into a gentle, feeble old woman, to be cherished and helped down the long hill she has climbed so bravely with her many burdens."

Louisa and May took a sky-parlour at the Bellevue Hotel, where they "had a queer time whisking up and down in the elevator, eating in a marble café, and sleeping on a sofa bed, that we might be genteel. It did not suit me at all. A great gale nearly blew the roof off, steam pipes exploded, and we were hungry. I was very tired with my hard summer, with no rest for the brains that earn the money."

Poor Louisa! She never spared herself; indeed, engrossed in her work, she forgot that she had a bundle of nerves, and a head but too prone to ache over the slightest exertion. So they came down from their "sky parlour" and went to quiet Chauncey Street. On January 1, 1869, Louisa sent the second volume of "Little Women" out into the world,—a wide, wide world, as it proved, for the book has been translated into French, German, and Dutch. In Holland, the first part was called "Under the Mother's Wings," and the second, "On Their Own Wings."

In March, they went back to Concord, for the old people were restless out of the home nest; Louisa was very tired and more ailing than she dared to say. Too much lay upon her shoulders, and she could not help feeling that if she fell ill the family would go to pieces, so she would often keep up and write her stories in spite of "headaches, cough, and

weariness." She was glad enough sometimes when the real pain gave her an excuse for resting, for her mind was easy in spite of physical woes, and when she could not write, she could at least " think over her blessings and be grateful," for " Little Women " paid the last debts of the family and Louisa's dreams were coming true. Each month, each week, the demand for " Little Women " increased, until she began to accept, as a matter of course, the large cheques her publishers were constantly sending her.

She wrote to them, December 28, 1869, from Boston :

" Many thanks for the cheque which made my Christmas an unusually merry one.

" After toiling so many years along the uphill road—always a hard one to women writers—it is peculiarly grateful to me to find the way growing easier at last, with pleasant little surprises blossoming on either side, and the rough places made smooth by the courtesy and kindness of those who have proved themselves friends as well as publishers.

" With best wishes for the coming year,

" I am, yours truly,

" L. M. ALCOTT."

Indeed, this earnest young pilgrim, who had carried so many burdens and was so very, very tired, began to see her goal in the distance. Surely for some good end they had played at " Pilgrim's Progress " in their childhood, had read their little books and had profited by their wisdom ; and what more fitting sermon could Louisa preach to her

unknown thousands of young friends than that which she has put into the preface of her book, adapted from John Bunyan himself?

Go then, my little Book, and show to all
That entertain, and bid thee welcome shall,
What thou dost keep close shut up in thy breast ;
And wish what thou dost show them may be blest
To them for good, may make them choose to be
Pilgrims better, by far, than thee or me.
Tell them of Mercy ; she is one
Who early hath her pilgrimage begun.
Yea, let young damsels learn of her to prize
The world which is to come, and so be wise ;
For little tripping maids may follow God
Along the ways which saintly feet have trod.

Surely no book has gone forth with a simpler purpose, and just because " Little Women " is *not* " preachy " it has found its way to the hearts of its readers. Honest little girls, striving to be good and carry their burdens cheerily, have prized it through generations ; it has given them a better grip on the small things of life, which count so much for true happiness ; but brightest of all the gems the book contains is the radiance of mother-love which shines through it.

The *March* girls loved their mother, made her their confidante, and turned to her through every trial of their lives ; she was companion and friend as well as teacher and guide, and many a girl, and many a mother, has learned a lesson from the beautiful example these " Little Women " have set them.

Louisa Alcott wrote many bright and wholesome stories after her " luck child " had found her a corner in the world of fame, but " Little Women " comes first on the shelf, and in the hearts of her admirers.

CHAPTER XII

"WHO'S WHO"

THE chief charm of Miss Alcott's stories is the "real life" in them. Many authors write of things that are true, but not all are so happy in bringing the vivid pictures before our minds. All the "little women" are very human and very lovable, for Louisa drew portraits of her sisters and herself, with a magic art, true to life, rich in colour.

Anna, with her sweet nature, her talent for acting, her little home graces and dainty ways, makes a charming *Meg*, whose romance with *John Brooke* closes the first volume with the far-off chime of wedding-bells. *Beth*, the gentle household spirit, with her love of music, her sweet influence, will never die to the readers of "Little Women." Dear as she was to the turbulent *Jo*, she was far more to Louisa, who mingled the memory of her in many of her tales. And golden-haired *Amy* perhaps lived longer than all, for the artistic talent was no stretch of sisterly imagination. The seed which sprouted in *Amy's* school-days bore its fruit in May Alcott's exquisite work in later years, and the loving pen which drew the self-willed, somewhat selfish little girl with such faithful strokes showed later on the graceful charming woman into which she had bloomed.

Miss Alcott had many golden-haired heroines in her stories. *Amy March* is an acknowledged portrait of her sister, and possibly the author of "The Eight Cousins" drew the portrait of *Rose* from the same source. The best and truest biography of Mrs. Alcott, Louisa has set forth tenderly in the character of *Marmee*.

"A stout, motherly lady with a 'can-I-help-you' look about her, which was truly delightful. She was not a particularly handsome person, but mothers are always lovely to their children, and the girls thought the grey cloak and unfashionable bonnet covered the most splendid woman in the world."

This is our introduction to our "little women's" *Marmee*, and further on: "The first sound in the morning was her voice as she went about the house, singing like a lark; and the last sound at night was the same cheery sound, for the girls never grew too old for that familiar lullaby."

The book is full of her loving, living presence, this *Marmee* whom Louisa shared so generously with a world of girls. *Mrs. March*, she tells us, "is all true, only not half good enough," but she did not know the power of her pen and how each stroke enhanced the beauty of the picture. This first volume tells us little of *Mr. March*, though in the second part we catch many sweet glimpses of Louisa's "dear *Plato*." *Mr. Laurence* she created from the memory of her grandfather, Colonel Joseph May, and the irascible old *Aunt March* was really the only character in the book not taken from a living original. There is scarcely an experience or adven-

ture of the four sisters which is not true to life. All of *Jo's* literary endeavours and *Amy's* artistic flights were real happenings in the Alcott family. In the choice of names, too, Miss Alcott was very clever. May being a family name and the name of a month *March* suggested itself as being equally appropriate for these "story-book" girls.

Meg was a made name for Anna, though Louisa often called her "Peggy"; but *Jo* had been a nickname for boyish Louisa during her girlhood, and certainly fits the tall, overgrown girl in "Little Women" to a "T." *Beth's* dear little name stands just as it was in life, and *Amy* is merely a transposing of letters in the name of her youngest sister, suggesting, too, "Abby," which was a favourite name with her friends.

But the chapters that really please us most are those that deal with the "Laurence Boy." About one million two hundred and fifty thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine girl-readers, from ten to fifteen years of age, have been in love with *Laurie* during the last forty years, and probably as many more faithful "loveresses" will rise up and adore him in the years to come. But for *Laurie*, indeed, it is doubtful if Miss Alcott herself could have written the book, and as she made him live, not only in "Little Women" but in "Little Men" and "Jo's Boys" as well, it may prove interesting to discover out of what material she fashioned this very best boy of her very best book.

There is no doubt that her Polish boy, Ladislav, suggested the idea of *Laurie*, a nickname by which she often called him in the pleasant days at Vevéy.

The dark foreign face, the love of music, the impulsive, affectionate disposition, were all finely drawn features of this living portrait. Miss Alcott says: "*Laurie* is *not* an American boy, though every lad I ever knew claims the character. He was a Polish boy I met abroad in 1865."

True, as far as it goes, yet in spite of this assertion, there has always been a question as to who this very real *Laurie* really was, and in a series of letters written to Alfred Whitman by Miss Alcott, covering a correspondence of eleven years, from 1858-69, we have still more evidence to prove that the original of *Laurie* was a divided honour.

In the autumn of 1857, Alfred Whitman, a lonely, flaxen-haired boy, came to Concord to attend Mr. Sanborn's school. He lived in the home of the Minot Pratts and became very intimate with John Pratt and Carrie, his only sister. John took him to call upon the Alcotts, just before Beth's death.

"In the little house near the Town Hall, . . .," writes Alfred Whitman himself, "began the acquaintance which was to bring to John Pratt a loving and devoted wife and to the writer a life-long friendship with the Alcotts and the Pratts. So close was the friendship and so hearty and genuine the way in which I was taken into companionship by these gifted people, that it never occurred to me that all, with the exception of Abby, were at least ten years older than myself, and though I was born and had lived all my days in Massachusetts, the last year of my life in that State seems to have included almost all that was permanent in my memory of

it, and Concord the only place I think of as home, though I lived there not quite a year."

Alfred Whitman became a member of the Concord Dramatic Union, organized by Mr. Sanborn, with the three Alcott girls, George B. Bartlett and his brothers, Ripley and Ned; Edward and Edith Emerson, and others, as members. The vestry-room of the Unitarian Church was used as a classroom by Mr. Sanborn, and here they erected their stage and acted their dramas.

Alfred Whitman was a shy boy of about fifteen when Louisa first met him; he was a blue-eyed, yellow-haired laddie, very much in colouring like her sister May, which attracted her at once, for she admired that type immensely. He was a reserved fellow, somewhat sad and serious at times, but Louisa found him out at last, thanks to Dickens. The Concord Dramatic Union gave a series of plays and dramatized scenes from his writings, most of them Louisa's clever work, and she and Alfred Whitman did some good acting together. She tells us about him in "My Boys," the first story of "Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag."

"My special boy of the batch was A., proud and cold and shy to other people, sad and serious sometimes, when his good heart and tender conscience showed him his shortcomings, but so grateful for sympathy and a kind word. . . .

"We played *Dolphus* and *Sophy Tetterby* in 'The Haunted Man,' at one of the school festivals; and during the rehearsals I discovered that my *Dolphus* was—permit the expression, oh, well-bred readers—a trump! What fun we had to be sure,

acting the droll and pathetic scenes together, with a swarm of little *Tetterbys* skirmishing about us. From that time he has been my *Dolphus* and I his *Sophy*, and my yellow-haired laddie doesn't forget me though he has a younger *Sophy* now, and some small *Tetterbys* of his own."

In November, 1858, Alfred Whitman left Concord for his new home in Kansas, and from that time kept up a vigorous correspondence with the Alcott family. The letters of Louisa, he writes, "were the most inspiring, and it is because I feel that they illustrate a phase of her character that has not been shown to the public as it should have been, that I have consented to their publication." Brave, bright, and hopeful are the letters which cover this period; all the sweetest and most attractive side of Louisa's nature shone forth in her intercourse with boys, and this boy, in particular, enjoyed the privilege of her warm affection.

But the closing letter of the series is the "clincher," which shows beyond all shadow of a doubt that Alfred Whitman was as much the original of *Laurie* as the ever-fascinating Polish Ladislas. It was written immediately after she had placed Part Second of "Little Women" in her publisher's hands.

Mr. F. B. Sanborn, Miss Alcott's life-long friend, introduces the letter with this brief foreword:

"As for Miss Alcott's statement that *Laurie* was wholly Ladislas, that must have been to escape annoying hints and questions, for it was obvious from the first that the Polish lad could not have

sat for the distinctly American traits in that composite and glorious human boy. Concord people have always felt that the Polish boy was not the sole original, and they have tried to guess who the other person really was. This letter solves the mystery, for written when the book was fresh, it tells the evident truth.

"F. B. SANBORN."

And here is the letter :

"BOSTON, January 6, 1869.

"DEAR ALF :

"I have planned to write you dozens of times, but work prevented ; but now I really will, though piles of MSS. lie waiting for my editorial eye. Don't you ever think old *Sophy* forgets her *Dolphus* ! Why, bless your heart, I put you into my story as one of the best and dearest lads I ever knew ! *Laurie* is you and my Polish boy jointly. You are the sober half, and my Ladislas (whom I met abroad) the gay, whirligig half ; he was a perfect dear.

"All my little girl friends are madly in love with *Laurie* and insist on a sequel, so I have written one which will make you laugh, especially the pairing-off part. But I didn't know how to settle my family any other way. I wanted to disappoint the young gossips, who vowed that *Laurie* and I should marry. Authors take dreadful liberties, but you will not mind being a happy spouse and a proud papa, will you ?

". . . If anything in those old times does you good and makes the memory sweet, I am truly glad, for it gives an added charm to home, to go halves

in it with some one who hasn't got any, and I should very much like to find another Alf to fill the empty place there, if that were possible.

"I'm fond of boys, as you may have discovered; I always want one somewhere handy, so, as you say you haven't grown up (which is a great comfort to me), I wish you'd come East and be our Alf again, if Mrs. Mary doesn't object.

"Good-bye, my dear boy, write to me and you shall truly get an answer from,

"Your ever loving old

"SOPHY."

There is a picture of this fair-haired boy, a handsome, thoughtful, most attractive face he had; but Louisa's *Laurie* was painted with Ladislas's colouring, dark hair and eyes, with a dreamy expression and a musical soul, that certainly did not belong to the New England boy, while the broad shoulders, athletic, well-knit figure, the prowess in boating, skating, horseback riding, and all active games were not attributes of the delicate Polish boy, as Louisa knew him.

Alfred Whitman's most intimate friend in Concord was John Pratt, who, though many years older, took a real brotherly interest in the lad. In their intercourse with the Alcott family they were always together, so in "Little Women" Louisa had brought out the friendship between *Laurie* and *John Brooke*, who was a faithful likeness of her brother-in-law. Indeed, in the first volume, the New England boy takes the lead, save in flashes of mischief, which Miss Alcott tells us belonged to Ladislas.

In the second volume, there is a delightful mixture of the romantic young foreigner and the mischievous undergraduate in the “grown-up *Laurie*” as we see him first after the lapse of three years. His passion for *Jo* is very American, and he bore his defeat with true New England fortitude ; but from the time he decided to go abroad and forget this hard-hearted young person, the New England part of him vanished. Every disappointed girl remembers that parting—how he embraced them all, and ran downstairs as if for his life.

“ *Jo* followed a minute after to wave her hand to him if he looked round. He did look round, came back, put his arms about her as she stood on the step above him, and looked up at her, with a face that made his short appeal both eloquent and pathetic.

“ ‘ Oh, *Jo*, can’t you ? ’

“ ‘ Teddy, dear, I wish I could ! ’

“ That was all, except a little pause ; then *Laurie* straightened himself up, said : ‘ It’s all right, never mind ’—and went away without another word. Ah, but it wasn’t all right, and *Jo* *did* mind ; for while the curly head lay on her arm a minute after her hard answer, she felt as if she had stabbed her dearest friend ; and when he left her without a look behind him, she knew that the boy *Laurie* would never come again.”

That was her last glimpse of Laddie, when they parted in Paris and he asked for the “ sweet English good-bye.” From that time we see most of *Ladislav*, until in the last chapter, under the apple trees at Plumfield, the New England part of him appears

again in "the happy spouse and the proud papa" with his little golden-haired girl in his arms, and his handsome, golden-haired wife close by.

A most lovable "glorious human boy," the nicest boy that ever shone as the hero of a girl's book, and "true" straight through, every inch of him!

Every enthusiastic reader claimed a "favourite" chapter, and Miss Alcott was deluged with letters from every quarter; honest and full of admiration they were, and save for the fact that they came in shoals, she would have liked to answer each one; but as that could not be, she contented herself with picking a few pretty buds of friendship from among these flowery epistles.

We are indebted to Mr. Bok, of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, for a charming glimpse of Miss Alcott's association with girls, for, after writing "Little Women," she had to tuck her pet boys in one corner of her heart, and open another corner to the thousands of girls who knocked for admittance. A special bunch of "little women" from Pennsylvania, five in number—and sisters, were much interested in the *Pickwick Portfolio* and resolved to follow the *March* girls' example, and print a little paper of their own. Their father bought them type and a printing press, and "in a short time the first issue of *Little Things* appeared, edited by Carrie, Maggie, Nellie, Emma, and Helen Lukens, the eldest of whom was barely seventeen." They sent a copy, of course, to Miss Alcott, who was not only delighted with the appearance of the little paper, but with the pluck and energy of the editors, and soon began to take a personal interest in the girls, which

lasted through the rest of her life. Their friendship began and ended in letters, for they never met. But “ Little Women ” drew them close together to begin with ; the girls’ letters were well written and clever ; Louisa’s were reproductions of herself, and original, witty, sensible and helpful, full of friendly advice about themselves and their paper.

Her first letter to them, dated Concord, August 3, 1872, begins :

“ MY DEAR LITTLE WOMEN :

“ I will certainly answer your pleasant letter and very gladly subscribe to your paper, although it has not yet arrived. My two ‘ little men ’ at once demanded it and were much impressed with the idea of girls having a printing press and getting out a ‘ truly paper.’ I admire your pluck and perseverance, and heartily believe in women’s right to any branch of labour for which they prove their fitness. Work is such a beautiful and helpful thing, and independence so delightful, that I wonder there are any lazy people in the world. I hope you preach that doctrine in your paper, not in the rampant Woman’s Rights fashion, but by showing how much women can do, even in attending skilfully to the ‘ little things ’ that have such an influence on home life, and through it, upon the world outside.”

She closes by saying : “ Please present my respects to the wise father of the five happy girls, and with best wishes for the success of the paper, believe me, very sincerely, your friend and fellow-worker,

“ LOUISA M. ALCOTT.”

Proud girls they were with such a letter, and there were many more to come. "Dear Girls" she wrote them in her next letter, then "Dear Sisters," and, finally, she called them by name, with a certain boyish friendliness which was part of Louisa, for she liked these girls, with their frank manner of asking questions and criticising her books. In one letter she sent, by request, a photograph of herself, and, after seeing a reprint of it, one need scarcely wonder that these girls and the friends to whom they showed it were disappointed. She writes in a postscript—she was very fond of postscripts :

"I send you the last photograph I have—not very good, but you can't make a Venus out of a tired old lady."

Now, considering this "old lady" was but forty at the time of writing, the girls might reasonably have expected something less settled. The spinster of forty these days does not take to shawls and middle-aged adornments. Louisa's glorious chestnut hair, fine eyes and complexion, and beautiful nose deserved better treatment. Nowadays we do not go by rule in dress ; we are more apt to consult the becoming, and if the prevailing style makes us look younger, so much the better. But in Louisa's time there were unwritten laws concerning dress ; there was a style for each period. Ladies of forty or more wore shawls, and downright honest Louisa draped one over her shoulders, thereby upsetting all popular ideas of boyish *Jo*.

"I sympathize with your friends on seeing my picture," she writes in another letter [they were

honest enough to speak their minds], "for I remember I was so upset when I saw Fredericka Bremer, whose books I loved, that my sister Nan and I went into a closet and cried, though we were great girls of sixteen and eighteen."

The five young editors sent her *their* photographs, and she wrote them an enthusiastic letter of thanks.

"DEAR SISTERS :

"I waited till the five were all here before I sent my thanks. They make a very pretty little 'landscape,' as *Jo* used to say, all in a group on my table, and I am glad to show such a posy of bright, enterprising girls. Long may they wave! My Marmee, though very feeble now, was much pleased at your message, and said, in her motherly way, as she looked at the five faces :

" ' Little dears, I wish I could see 'em all and do something for 'em.' "

"Perhaps some of these summers we may see a band of pilgrims coming up to our door, and then the three old *March* girls and the five young L—ditto will sit in a bunch and spin yarns. Pray we do."

Evidently the girls had literary ambition, and sought her advice, which she freely gave them.

"Of one thing let me, an old scribbler, warn you," she goes on. "Don't write with steel pens, or you will have what is called 'writer's cramp' and lose the use of your thumb, as I have. I have to wobble around with two fingers, while my absurd thumb is folded under and no good for pen work, though all right for other things. Look at my wild

scribbles and use cork penholders or gold pens, and don't write fourteen hours at a stretch, as I used to do."

Think of a writer now, dependent on steel pens and a bottle of ink! Had Louisa in the early days of her career used a typewriter and a fountain pen, or dictated her stories to a writer of shorthand who would then have typewritten them, there is no telling how many more delightful books would have fallen to our share and how much less the worn-out nerves and the aching head would have had to tax them.

"I am glad," she continues, "there is ironing and preserving to rest the busy brains with good, wholesome work. I believe in it so heartily that I sweep my eight rooms twice a week, iron and scrub around for health's sake, as I have found it better medicine than any doctor ever gave me."

Energetic Louisa carried her "medicine" almost too far at times. The hospital strain had not daunted her soul, but it had certainly weakened her body, and rest, as she found out later, was what she needed above all. Of course, she added a postscript—a most interesting one:

"You may like to know that my Polish boy, Laddie (or Laurie), has turned up in New York, alive and well, with a wife and 'two little daughters,' as he says in his funny English. He is coming to see me, and I expect to find my romantic boy a stout papa—the glory all gone. Isn't it sad?"

"As I can't give or lend you the dear old original, I send you a picture of Marmee, taken some ten or

fifteen years ago. She is much changed now, wears caps, and is old and broken sadly."

In another letter she says :

"Why people will think *Jo* small, when she is described as tall, I can't see ; and why insist that she must be young, when she is said to be thirty at the end of the book ? "

Concerning *Jo*, Miss Alcott and her reading public were always squabbling ; the truthful authoress must cast no glamour of romance around her, while enthusiastic readers built castles in the air, which everyday *Jo* refused to inhabit. Indeed, to Louisa herself, the *March* girls had become real people, and she talked about them quite as intimately as she discussed her own family affairs, and the correspondence with these other "little women" made them seem even more real. So we see what this one simple little story has done for the world of girls, but we can never know what it did for Louisa herself.

Unwillingly she had turned out of her way into this new path, never dreaming she would find her goal at the end of this little country road, and she was rewarded by having flowers spring up around her sweeter and lovelier than any she had yet gathered. She herself looked on in wonder, as, one by one, her dearest hopes were gratified ; she had only to put forth her hand and it was filled with gold, which she scattered broadcast for the good of others. She began to love the girls for whom she wrote, she studied them, she had much to say to them, for they had brought her luck. She never forsook her boys, but when fair young faces beamed

upon her, and girlish hearts took her in, and girlish hands stretched out to her, who could hold back? Surely not Louisa! She embraced them all in her wholesome, hearty way; they became her dear "little sisters," and she worked for them all the rest of her life.

CHAPTER XIII

"SHAWL STRAPS"

WHILE the world rang with the praises of "Little Women," Louisa, ill and tired, found that being a celebrated person was just a bit annoying.

"People begin to come and stare at the Alcotts," she writes in her journal. "Reporters haunt the place to look at the authoress, who dodges into the woods *à la* Hawthorne, and won't be even a very small lion."

But it was pleasant to rest and take breath after the long uphill struggle, and the winter of 1869 was happily spent in Boston, doing very little literary work beyond revising "Hospital Sketches," to which she added six "Camp and Fireside Stories." These she handed over to Roberts Brothers, and they were republished with great success. Money now came in so plentifully that she was able to put by small sums for investment, besides making her beloved family "cosy and comfortable."

The early summer months she stayed in Concord, but she was never well there, and the long hot days were very trying to her. Her health demanded a change, so she spent the month of July with her cousins, the Frothinghams, in Canada. They had a house at Rivière du Loup, "a little village on the

St. Lawrence, full of queer people. Drove, read, and walked with the little ones. A pleasant, quiet time."

"*August.* A month with May at Mt. Desert. A gay time and a little rest and pleasure before the old pain and worry began again. Made up a thousand dollars for S. E. S. to invest. Now I have twelve hundred for a rainy day and no debts. With that thought I can bear neuralgia gaily."

Indeed, pain was now Louisa's unfailing guest.

In the autumn they all went to Boston. Mr. and Mrs. Alcott to stay with Anna, while Louisa and May had pleasant rooms not far away. At this time, Mrs. Cheney tells us that Louisa "not being well enough to do much new work, began using up her old stories, and found the 'little women' helped their rejected sisters to good places, where once they went a-begging." As the winter came upon them she grew more and more ailing, and when in February she finished "An Old-Fashioned Girl," she was quite used up.

"I wrote it with left hand in a sling, one foot up, head aching, and no voice. Yet as the book is funny, people will say 'Didn't you enjoy doing it?' I often think of poor Tom Hood as I scribble rather than lie and groan. I certainly earn my living by the sweat of my brow."

But she soon began to realize the penalties of greatness; the public besieged her, not only did the children, for whom she wrote, clamour for "more stories, more, right away," but even their elders began to act foolishly. Poor Louisa, who loved the big world, found the strangers who "demanded to

look at her, question, advise, warn, congratulate”—most tiresome, impertinent beings. With no claim upon her, they would invade her privacy and drive her to distraction. She bore this very quietly in the early days of her fame, but in “ Jo’s Boys,” the last of the “ Little Women ” series, in the chapter called “ Jo’s Last Scrape,” she speaks her mind, after years of torment.

Taken as a whole, this clever chapter is a complete and spirited autobiography of Louisa, at the time of the launching of “ Little Women,” and, to be properly appreciated, should be read aloud by some one whose sense of humour is as keen as hers was. She says of herself :

“ Things always went by contraries with Jo. Her first book, laboured over for years, . . . foundered on its voyage. . . . The hastily written story, sent away with no thought beyond the few dollars it might bring, sailed with a fair wind and a wise pilot at the helm straight into public favour, and came home heavily laden with an unexpected cargo of gold and glory.

“ She did her best for the children, . . . feeling that she owed a good deal to the little friends in whose sight she had found favour after twenty years of effort.

“ But a time came when her patience gave out ; and wearying of being a lion, she became a bear in nature as in name, and retiring to her den, growled awfully when ordered out.”

It was certainly very funny, but no less annoying, for all that. If the demand for autographs and photographs had been the only grievance, she might

have borne it calmly, but "when a series of enthusiastic boarding schools had ravaged her grounds for trophies, and a steady stream of amiable pilgrims had worn her doorsteps with their respectful feet; when servants left after a week's trial of the bell that rang all day," then did Louisa begin seriously to think of flight. Not anywhere in America could she hide herself—she was known far and wide. Even her father, whose true worth and talents had never before been appreciated, was now welcomed everywhere with open arms, as the "Grandfather of 'Little Women.'" The ocean must roll between her and her too ardent admirers. She was not strong enough to stand her popularity. Perhaps the following poem from an unknown genius hastened her decision. Such absurdity always roused her wrath.

In "Jo's Boys" it was dedicated to J. M. B., and with the exception of the last verse, which she altered for the use of her story, is a true offering.

"Oh, were I a heliotrope
I would play poet,
And blow a breeze of fragrance
To you; and none should know it.

"Your form like the stately elm,
When Phœbus gilds the morning ray,
Your cheek like the ocean bed
That blooms a rose in May.

"Your words are wise and bright,
I bequeath them to you a legacy given,
And when your spirit takes its flight,
May it bloom a flower in Heaven.

“ My tongue in flattering language spoke,
And sweeter silence never broke,
In busiest street or loneliest glen,
I take you with the flashes of my pen.

“ Consider the lilies, how they grow ;
They toil not, yet are fair
Gems and flowers and Solomon’s seal.
The geranium of the world is J. M. Bhaer.

“ JAMES.”

Any more such poems would have made Louisa inclined to endow an asylum for lunatics, and so she ran for her life to the other side of the world.

May was invited by a friend to go abroad, on condition that Louisa would be of the party. For a long time she hesitated ; she was not well and the undertaking looked enormous. But her sister was wild to go, and the two younger women were really dependent on an older head and wiser judgment ; besides, Louisa had been abroad before and knew something of foreign travel, so after much hesitation she “ gave in.”

Their minds made up, it did not take the trio long to get ready, and on the first of April, “ fit day for *my* undertaking ” she says in her journal, “ May and I went to New York to meet Alice Bartlett with John for escort. Everyone very kind, thirty gifts, a parting ball among our housemates, and a great cake. Half a dozen devoted beings at the station to see us off. But I remember only Father and Mother, as they went away the day before, leaving the two ambitious daughters to sail away, perhaps forever. Mother kept up bravely and nodded and smiled ; but at the corner I saw the

white handkerchief go up to the eyes, after being gaily waved to us. May and I broke down and said: 'We won't go,' but next day we set forth as young birds will, and left the nest empty for a year.

"Sailed on the 2nd in a gale of wind, in the French steamer *Lafayette* for Brest. Our adventures are told in 'Shawl Straps.' 'Old-Fashioned Girl' came out in March and sold well. Train-boy going to New York put it into my lap, and when I said I didn't care for it, exclaimed with surprise: 'Bully book, ma'am. Sell a lot; better have it.'

"John told him I wrote it; and his chuckle, stare, and astonished 'No!' was great fun. On the steamer little girls had it, and came in a party to call on me, very seasick in my berth, done up like a mummy."

It did not need "Little Women's" popularity alone to sell "An Old-Fashioned Girl." Nowhere could one find a more charming heroine in girlhood than this sweet, simple, pretty, old-fashioned *Polly*. We all love her and sympathize with the many trials and tests which did their part in the making of a lovely young woman.

Polly is what might be called a composite photograph, that is to say, Miss Alcott took the best traits of all the best girls she knew, and smoothed them out and polished them up, and set them to music in the soul of this little country girl. Not that *Polly* was perfect, for then she would have been an impossible little prig; but she was very human and very real, and the boy *Tom*, with his freckled face and red hair, full of mischief, but sound at the

kernel, was a real boy, too, a boy after Louisa's own heart.

She brings the country mouse to the city, but one can see at a glance that *Polly* came from Concord, and the simple teaching of a certain wise mother found its way into the heart of Boston. Louisa always despised the hollowness and shams of what was called " good society," and that pretty, honest *Polly* was able to see the best side of it is a great satisfaction to the girl readers. The same little *Pollys* can be found to-day who existed in Louisa's days ; indeed, time gives only an added touch of colour to Miss Alcott's boys and girls. So well she loved them, so thoroughly she knew them, that we have them with us always as real, as truly living as in the past. Leaving this golden egg behind her, the " ugly duckling," as Louisa laughingly called herself, sailed away with the proud air of a swan.

This trip to Europe was many strides ahead of the other. In 1865, Louisa, worn-out by a long illness, and anxious for a change she could ill afford, took advantage of an opportunity and went over as the companion of an invalid. In 1870, still in search of health, she crossed again, but think what a difference ! Here she was, a woman of independent means, able to go where she liked and do what she pleased, having left all safe and comfortable at home. Besides this, she was one of a very lively trio, and though in " Shawl Straps " she persistently described herself, under the name of *Lavinia*, as an old lady, she was only thirty-seven when they set out.

She has left us many pleasant memories of her year's travel, delightful letters and jottings in her

journal, and the little book, "Shawl Straps," which is a graphic account of their tour through France. It came out first serially in the *Christian Union* at the request of her friend, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. Afterwards it was published by Roberts Brothers as the second volume of "Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag," and makes interesting reading for any boy or girl who wishes to know something of the countries through which they flitted.

They had a jolly time aboard ship in spite of seasickness and ceaseless pitching, for they were driving in the very teeth of a gale. Their friend she named *Amanda* in "Shawl Straps"; May she dubbed *Matilda*, and these maidens played prominent and funny parts all through their adventures.

Such a year as that was! Such glimpses of interesting countries! *Amanda* was their stand-by, for she could speak French, and from the time they landed in Brest until they reached English-speaking London, they depended on her entirely.

Louisa divided "Shawl Straps" into six parts. The first was naturally called "Off"; then followed "Brittany," "France," "Italy," "Switzerland," and "London." They spent the spring and summer in Brittany. Landing at Brest, they went by train to Morlaix, their first stopping-place, and as Louisa tells us in "Shawl Straps," "through a green and blooming country so unlike the New England spring they had left behind that they rejoiced like butterflies in the sunshine."

They drove to Dinan, some fourteen miles, "in a ramshackle carriage, drawn by three fierce little horses, with their tails done up in braided *chignons*,

and driven by a humpback." Here their adventures began, for these three young women, who had come to enjoy themselves, found much to laugh at among their companions, from the sleepy old priest who smoked his pipe the whole way, to the big tipsy Frenchman, who paid violent attention to poor abashed *Amanda*, and informed her in a burst of confidence that he was " obliged to drink much ale, because it went to his head and gave him commercial ideas."

They found Dinan a charming spot, where they stayed, resting and frolicking, from April 17th to the middle of June. The walks and drives were picturesque, the views from the pretty house where they stopped were entrancing, " for the windows," Louisa writes in one of her home letters, " overlook a lovely green valley, full of gardens, blooming plum and peach trees, windmills, and a ruined castle, at sight of which we all skipped. Madame Coste received us with rapture. . . . We were in great luck, for, being early in the season, she had three rooms left, and we nabbed them at once—a salon, with old oak walls and wardrobes, a fireplace, funny windows, and quaint blue damask furniture. A little room out of it for A., and upstairs a large room for May and me, with two beds draped in green chintz, and a carved big wardrobe, and so forth, and best of all, a sunny window toward the valley. For these rooms and our board we each pay one dollar a day—and I call that cheap. It would be worth that to get the fun and air alone, for it is like June, and we sit about with open windows, flowers in the fields, and birds singing."

Their fellow-boarders were most amusing, and as soon as they began to stammer in French they got along very well. The simple inhabitants were great fun to them, and Louisa noticed with much interest that it was the women who did all the hard work.

“ They not only kept house, reared children, and knit every imaginable garment the human frame can wear, but kept the shops and the markets, tilled the gardens, cleaned the streets, and bought and sold cattle, leaving the men free to enjoy the only pursuits they seemed inclined to follow—breaking horses, mending roads, and getting drunk. . . . It took two deliberate men nearly a week to split the gnarled logs [wood for Madame Coste], and one brisk woman carried them into the cellar and piled them neatly. The men stopped about once an hour to smoke, drink cider, or rest. The woman worked steadily from morning till night, only pausing at noon for a bit of bread and the soup good Coste sent out to her. . . . This same capable lady used to come to market with a baby on one arm, a basket of fruit on the other, leading a pig, driving a donkey, and surrounded by sheep, while her head bore a pannier of vegetables, and her hands spun busily with a distaff. How she ever got on with these trifling encumbrances was a mystery ; but there she was, busy, placid, and smiling, in the midst of the crowd, and at night went home with her shopping, well content.”

During those early weeks Louisa rested, while the others did the exploring and had funny adventures ; but presently the mild air, the out-of-door

life, and beyond all, the calm and quiet of this beautiful foreign country, where no one knew she was an authoress, and many had never even heard of " Little Women "—all these happy conditions made her feel like a new person, and she was soon able to join in the fun with all her old-time energy. The simple peasant life in the little Breton villages gave her much pleasure, and the three spent some happy days wandering at will over the lovely surroundings. There were many things to attract them ; beautiful woods full of alluring paths, ruined castles, quaint churches and chapels—all choice bits for May's artistic appetite to feed upon, while Louisa enjoyed studying these new scenes and new people.

The donkeys of Dinan interested her quite as much as the people, and in " Shawl Straps " she gives us a humorous description of their adventures with these small animals. When they took donkey drives she tells us : " The cavalcade on such occasions was an imposing spectacle. Matilda, being fond of horses, likewise affected donkeys (or thought she did till she tried to drive one), and usually went first in a small vehicle drawn by an animal who looked about the size of a mouse, when the stately Mat, in full array, yellow parasol, long whip, camp stool and sketchbook, sat bolt upright on her perch, driving in the most approved manner. The small beast, after much whipping, would break into a trot, and go pattering over the hard white road, with his long ears wagging, and his tiny hoofs raising a great dust for the benefit of the other turn-out just behind.

" In a double chair sat Lavinia, bundled up as usual, and the amiable Amanda, both flushed with

constant pokings and thrashings of their steed. A venerable ass, so like an old whitey-brown hair trunk as to his body, and Nick Bottom's mask as to his head, that he was a constant source of mirth to the ladies. Mild and venerable as he looked, however, he was a most incorrigible beast, and it took two immortal souls, and four arms, to get the ancient donkey along. . . . Matilda got on better, for little Bernard du Guesclin, as she named her mouse, was so very small that she could take him up and turn him round bodily when other means failed, or pull him half into the chair if danger threatened in front. He was a sprightly little fellow, and had not yet lost all the ardour of youth, or developed the fiendish obstinacy of his kind ; so he frequently ran little races, now and then pranced, and was not quite dead to the emotion of gratitude for bits of bread.

" Truly, yes ; the fair Mat, with her five feet seven inches, and little Bernard, whose longest ear when most erect did not reach much above her waist, were a sweet pair of friends, and caused her mates great amusement.

" ' I must have some one to play with, for I can't improve my mind all the time, as Mandy does, or cuddle and doze like Livy. I've had experience with young donkeys of all sorts, and I give you my word little Bernie is much better fun than some I've known with shorter ears and fewer legs.'

" Thus Matilda, regardless of the jeers of her friends when they proposed having the small beast into the salon to beguile the tedium of a rainy day."

Louisa's home letters from Dinan are all very

delightful, usually to the family, for she was not well enough yet to do regular correspondence. In a postscript to a letter dated May 30, 1870, she writes :

" No news except through Niles, who yesterday sent me a nice letter with July account of \$6,212, a neat little sum for 'the Alcotts, who can't make money!' With \$10,000 well invested, and more coming in all the time, I think we may venture to enjoy ourselves, after the hard times we have all had. The cream of the joke is that we made our own money ourselves, and no one gave us a blessed penny."

Brittany was so entrancing that they would have loved to stay longer in this happy spot ; but they had limited themselves to a year of travel, and two months was all they could spare of their precious time. It was a pretty journey through the Breton country, with its wealth of summer foliage and flowers. They went from Dinan to Geneva, skimming through France on the way, stopping at St. Malo, Le Mans, Tours, Amboise, and Blois, Orleans, Nevers and other places.

At Tours they halted for several days, finding it a most interesting spot, especially the cathedral.

" May has done the church for you," writes Louisa to her father ; " and I send the photograph to give some idea of it. The inside is very beautiful ; and we go at sunset to see the red light make the grey walls lovely outside, and the shadows steal from chapel to chapel inside, filling the great church with what is really 'a dim, religious gloom.' "

At Amboise they saw the castle where Charles VIII. was born, and the terrace where the poor Huguenots were strung up, while the gay court looked on and enjoyed the sight ; also the little, low door, where Anne of Brittany's first husband, this very Charles VIII., "bumped his head" and killed himself, as he was running through to play bowls with his wife. It was in this castle that Margaret of Anjou and her son were reconciled to Warwick during the War of the Roses.

At Blois they found a castle full of historic interest, and records of the dark deeds of the terrible Catherine de Medici and her weak son, Henry III.

They stopped in Orleans for a day to get some relics of Jeanne D'Arc, and saw the famous statue of the Maid, put up in gratitude by the people of the city she saved.

Their resting-place was Geneva. "We are at the Metropole Hotel," Louisa writes, "right on the Lake, with a glimpse of Mont Blanc from our windows."

They were detained in Switzerland by the Franco-Prussian War, which interfered with their letters home and made travelling rather hard. In July, 1870, she wrote to Anna :

"The war along the Rhine is sending troops of travellers to Switzerland for refuge ; and all the large towns are brimful of people flying from Germany. It won't trouble us, for we have done France, and don't mean to do Germany. So when August is over, we shall trot forward to Italy and find a warm place for our winter quarters. At any time, twenty-four hours carries us over the Simplon, so we sit

at ease, and don't care a straw for old France and Prussia. Russia, it is reported, has joined in the fight, but Italy and England are not going to meddle, so we can fly to either ' in case of fire.' "

This last quoted sentence, Mrs. Cheney tells us, was " a family joke, as Mrs. Alcott always ended her instructions to her children ' in case of fire.' " It was, indeed, the same motherly forethought which prompted *Mrs. March* to call out of the window, as *Meg* and *Jo* went to the party : " Girls—girls—*have* you clean pocket-handkerchiefs ? " And many of Mrs. Alcott's quaint sayings have reappeared in one after the other of her daughter's stories.

Dickens' death occurred while they were at Bex, and Louisa mourned most sincerely, though she says truthfully : " I shall miss my old Charlie, but he is not the old idol he once was." It was about this time that Mr. Higginson and a little girl friend put together the " Operatic Tragedy " in " Little Women " and set the songs to music for *Our Young Folks*, and Miss Alcott herself, even in her security beyond the seas, began to be besieged by eager magazines and papers for contributions. Poor Louisa was in despair.

" Dear Mr. Niles," she wrote her faithful publisher, " I keep receiving requests from editors to write for their papers and magazines. I am truly grateful, but having come abroad for rest, I am not inclined to try the treadmill till my year's vacation is over ; so to appease these worthy gentlemen and excuse my seeming idleness, I send you a trifle in rhyme, which you can (if you think it worth the trouble) set going, as a general answer to everybody."

The clever poem of thirty-one verses is too long to quote fully, but some of it may prove most amusing. Louisa called her jingle—indeed it was little more,—

THE LAY OF A GOLDEN GOOSE.

Long ago in a poultry yard,
One dull November morn,
Beneath a motherly soft wing,
A little goose was born.

Who straightway peeped out of the shell
To view the world beyond,
Longing at once to sally forth,
And paddle in the pond.

"Oh! be not rash," her father said,
A mild Socratic bird;
Her mother begged her not to stray,
With many a warning word.

But little goosey was perverse
And eagerly did cry,
"I've got a lovely pair of wings—
Of course I ought to fly."

In vain parental cacklings,
In vain the cold sky's frown,
Ambitious goosey tried to soar,
But always tumbled down.

Hard times she had, as one may guess,
That young aspiring bird,
Who still from every fall arose,
Saddened—but undeterred.

But something stronger than herself,
Would cry, "Go on—go on!
Remember, though an humble fowl,
You're cousin to a swan."

So up and down poor goosey went,
A busy hopeful bird,
Searched many wide, unfruitful fields,
And many waters stirred.

At length she came unto a stream,
Most fertile of all *Niles*,
Where tuneful birds might soar and sing
Among the leafy isles.

Here did she build a little nest,
Beside the waters still,
Where the parent goose could rest,
Unvexed by any *bill*.

And here she paused to smooth her plumes,
Ruffled by many plagues,
When suddenly arose the cry,
" This goose lays golden eggs ! "

Miss Alcott devotes several verses to the excitement in the poultry-yard after this discovery. All the proud and haughty fowls begin to take notice of the poor, despised goose, and would have kept her laying new eggs all the time.

But best of all—the little fowls,
Still playing on the shore,
Soft downy chicks and goslings gay,
Chirped out " Dear goose, lay more."

But goosey, all these weary years,
Had toiled like any ant,
And wearied out she now replied,
" My little dears, I can't."

So to escape too many friends
Without uncivil strife,
She ran to the Atlantic pond,
And paddled for her life.

But still across the briny deep,
Couched in most friendly words,
Came prayers for letters, tales or verse,
From literary birds.

Whereat the renovated fowl,
With grateful thanks profuse,
Took from her wing a quill, and wrote
This Lay of a Golden Goose.

This was written at Bex, and later the three travellers went to Vevéy, a spot so full of memories to Louisa; the days when she rowed on the lake, walked, or drove about with her gallant Polish boy, all came vividly back to her. She had lost sight of him for a while. She did not even know then, as she did later, that he was still alive, and there were times when she wandered sadly about their old haunts; for Louisa, despite her eight-and-thirty winters, was as romantic as a girl about her many friendships.

They stayed at Vevéy until September, then they took a wonderful journey through the heart of the Alps into Italy. "Crossing the Simplon alone was an experience worth having," she writes to her mother, and she goes on with a brilliant description of the gorges, the snow-capped mountain peaks rising about them, all bathed in the moonlight. In the early part of November, refreshed by a summer so full of rest and beauty, the travellers found themselves in Rome. May immediately planned her winter's work. They secured a pleasant apartment of six rooms, for a moderate price, and set up house-keeping with a maid, intending to be very happy and comfortable for the next few months. The trip had

thus far been a success. Louisa had gone away a nervous invalid ; in Rome she hardly knew herself, her strength had come slowly back to her, and she was beginning to think seriously of more literary work. Then, with a sudden shock, came the news of the death of John Pratt, and Louisa realized to the full what a void the absence of this well-beloved brother would make in their lives.

This blow turned her thoughts toward home, but they took shape in writing, for the widowed sister and the fatherless nephews must never be allowed a moment's want. So her grief, as usual, found solace in the work she loved, and the result was a book that has lived for many generations in the hearts of boys and girls. But “ Little Men ” needs a chapter of its own.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BIRTH OF "LITTLE MEN"

THE death of John Pratt was the second great sorrow in Louisa's life. The serene and quiet nature of the man had won its place and held it in the warm hearts of the Alcott family, and they mourned for him as for one of their very own. He had been close to them in their first trial; his gentle hands had helped to carry Beth to her last resting-place; his strong arm had been something for Anna to lean upon when it all had seemed so hard to bear, and his love had been like the warmth of the sun. His sudden death left them stunned, but Anna was the true daughter of a philosopher; she gathered her two precious little boys close to her heart, saying: "I will live for them, and make them happy." She smiled bravely through her tears, and made her grief a sacred memory, which stayed with her always.

John Pratt was a living presence in his household, and Louisa has drawn such a fine portrait of him that he will not be forgotten by others. "Now that John is dead," she writes in her journal, "I can truly say we all had cause to bless the day he came into the family, for we gained a son and brother, and Anna, the best husband ever known.

For ten years he made her home a little heaven of love and peace ; and when he died, he left her the legacy of a beautiful life, and an honest name to his little sons."

John Brooke is known and loved by every reader of "Little Women," and his memory is revered and honoured by every reader of "Little Men," for Louisa wrote the book far away in Rome, with her heart full of this new grief. She says in her journal of 1871 :

"Began to write a new book—'Little Men,' that John's death may not leave Anna and the dear little boys in want. John took care that they should have enough while the boys are young, and worked very hard to have a little sum to leave, without a debt anywhere.

"In writing and thinking of the little lads to whom I must be a father now, I found comfort for my sorrow."

In "Little Men" she has given us a chapter to the memory of this dearly loved brother, a beautiful chapter, which has been better than a sermon to many boys. It is here that Miss Alcott's great gift lies, she wrote of what lay closest to her heart. That which interested her keenly as a girl, she knew would interest other girls, and so the intimate family life of the Alcotts, all the trials and the struggles, all the joys, the sorrows, the successes and disappointments, were frankly told, that other struggling girls might take courage and go forward. Their varied experiences, often humorous, sometimes pathetic, were given without reserve, and told in such a way that others might profit by them.

So in the character of *John Brooke* she has paid rich tribute to John Pratt.

Speaking of his death, *Mr. Bhaer* tells the boys at Plumfield: "He was ill only a few hours, and died as he had lived, so cheerfully, so peacefully, that it seems a sin to mar the beauty of it with any violent or selfish grief."

There is a touching description of the simple funeral:

"The little house looked as quiet, sunny, and homelike as when Meg entered it a bride, ten years ago, only then it was early summer, and roses bloomed everywhere; now it was early autumn, and dead leaves rustled softly down, leaving the branches bare. The bride was a widow now; but the same beautiful serenity shone in her face, and the sweet resignation of a truly pious soul made her presence a consolation to those who came to comfort her.

". . . One would have said that modest John Brooke, in his busy, quiet, humble life, had had little time to make friends; but now they seemed to start up everywhere; old and young, rich and poor, high and low; for, all unconsciously, his influence had made itself widely felt, his virtues were remembered, and his hidden charities rose up to bless him."

Afterwards, when the Plumfield lads were talking of the dead man, *Jack*, the commercial one, said:

"He wasn't rich, was he?"

"No."

"He never did anything to make a stir in the world, did he?"

"No."

"He was only good?"

"That's all. . . ."

"Only good. That is *all*, and everything," said *Mr. Bhaer*, who had overheard the last few words, and guessed what was going on in the minds of the lads.

And then Louisa put into the mouth of her *Professor* all the love and admiration so beautiful a life had called forth.

"Yes," he said, "simple, genuine goodness is the best capital to found the business of this life upon. It lasts when fame and money fail, and is the only riches we can take out of this world with us. Remember that, my boys, and if you want to earn respect and confidence and love, follow in the footsteps of John Brooke."

Just as *Mr. Bhaer* impressed the little men at Plumfield, so the little men all over the world have taken the lesson to heart, for Louisa Alcott preached her sermons from the portals of her own home, which she flung wide that all might enter.

Truly "Little Men" was a labour of love. She dedicated the book to her nephews :

To

FREDDY AND JOHNNY,

The Little Men

To whom she owes some of the best
and happiest hours of her life.

This book is gratefully dedicated

By their loving

"AUNT WEEDY."

They are big men now, with families of their own, but the simple dedication no doubt is of more value to them than the finest poem.

The chapter about *John Brooke* is the only sad and sober part of "Little Men." There is always a streak of earnestness underlying even the pranks and plays at Plumfield, but from the time poor ragged *Nat* entered the hospitable gates, we begin to feel the breeziness and fun that contact with boys always brought out in Louisa herself.

We meet a great many old friends at the *Bhaers'* school. First and foremost, *Jo*, a grown-up, motherly *Jo*, with still the spirit of a boy behind the "bib and tucker," a jolly, lovable, tender, wholesome *Jo*, living her girlhood over in the lives of the boys and girls about her. There's the dear old *Professor*, too, for whom, in spite of our disappointment over *Laurie*, we begin to have a warm affection, and his two nephews, *Franz* and *Emil*.

Daisy and *Demi* have walked out of babyhood into the Plumfield school, and their characters stand forth well defined, for Miss Alcott was at her best when she had a living subject on her canvas. The little twins are really her two nephews, and are true portraits, as she tells us herself. *Uncle Laurie* and *Aunt Amy* are the fairy god-parents, whose coming is always hailed with delight, and little *Goldilocks* we have also met before, while in the background *Aunt Meg*, old *Mr. Lawrence*, and *Mr.* and *Mrs. March* awake fond recollections of "Little Women." Even *Nurse Hummel* is a memory, and takes us back to that Christmas day when the *March* girls gave up their breakfast to the poor, starving German family.

There are many new faces, foremost among them *Tommy Bangs*, *Naughty Nan*, and *Dan*, the wild young colt of a boy, with a spirit easily tamed by love and kindness. There are little dashes of truth in all these characters. *Naughty Nan* was Louisa herself in her romping little girlhood, and many of her pranks could be traced back to the very heart of the Alcott family. *Tommy Bangs* was a dozen of her pet boys rolled into one; but *Dan* was the sort of boy who touched her most. Sullen, rough, hard to manage, but with a streak of gold beneath all the grime of the streets, where his early life had been spent.

Miss Alcott loved this *Dan*, and in "Jo's Boys," the last long story she gave us, we find a grown-up *Dan*, a big, lonely, pathetic figure to the very end, where he dies for his chosen people.

Because she was interested, the writing of "Little Men" went quickly. Indeed, her best work was always done "in a vortex," as she expressed it, and before she had left Rome the story was safe in America, in the hands of her publishers. The travelling party finished their tour as they had planned. Louisa enjoyed Rome in her own way, while May went on with her art studies, learning, as she herself expressed it, "how little she knew, and how to go on."

We find this entry in her journal: "Rome—great inundation. Streets flooded, churches with four feet of water in them, and queer times for those who were in the overflowed quarters. Meals hoisted up at the window, people carried across the river-like streets to make calls; and all manner of funny

doings. We were high and dry at Piazza Barbarini [the name of their home] and enjoyed the flurry.

"To the capital often to spend the A.M. with the Roman emperors and other great men. Marcus Aurelius as a boy was fine; Cicero looked very like Wendell Phillips; Agrippina in her chair—was charming; but the other ladies, with hair *à la* sponge—were ugly; Nero & Co., a set of brutes and bad men. But a better sight to me was the crowd of poor people going to get the bread and money sent by the king; and the splendid snow-covered hills were finer than the marble beauty inside. Art tires, Nature never."

In the early days of struggle and poverty, poor Louisa had to pull down her castles in the air, storey by storey; now, with money coming in from a dozen different sources, she found she could enlarge her plans, and as she had just received the goodly sum of seven hundred dollars from "Moods," and was expecting many thousands from the sale of "Little Men," she decided to leave May abroad for another year, free from care, and able to devote herself to her beloved art.

So they picked up their belongings and spent the month of March at Albano, a lovely spot, where Louisa could walk and write and rest, and enjoy the adventures of the two girls, which she describes in "Shawl Straps" in her own quaint way.

They had attracted the attention of some romantic looking cavalry officers, and Louisa, greatly amused, was forced, nevertheless, to play the stern chaperon. As *Lavinia*, she takes the elderly tone of the severe duenna.

Letter from MAY ALCOTT to EDWARD MARSTON

Dear Mr. Marston

I am delighted
to see that "Ellis's Hall"
beyond a doubt &
look really in covers.

With many thanks

for the accompanying
volumes

Believe me

Yrs very truly

May Alcott

June 5th / 73

Letter from MAY ALCOTT to EDWARD MARSTON
(Continued).

I hear Mr. Pills is in
great spirits just now,
about "Josh" and he con-
siders my sisters best
book. & tho business is dull
the other side of the water,
still he predicts a good
sale for it. He has already
surprised me by publishing

two of my letters, so don't
be astonished if you find
another Alcott in the
field, clamoring for literary
fame.

"I'm going to Venice next week," she says, "so you may as well make up your minds to it, girls. . . . I should never dare to go home and say that Mat had run away with a man as handsome as Jove and as poor as Job. Amanda's indignant relatives would rise up and stone me if I let her canter into matrimony with the fascinating Colonel. . . . They *must* be torn away at once, or my character as duenna is lost forever."

In April, they enjoyed two ideal weeks "floating about" in Venice, and May found them in London, where they took pleasant lodgings and went sight-seeing. Their friend and travelling companion sailed for America on the eleventh, and Miss Alcott decided to go on the twenty-fifth, as she was needed at home. "Little Men" was published in London before she left.

In his interesting book, entitled "After Work," Mr. Edward Marston has referred to the relations between Louisa and May Alcott and the publishing firm of Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston & Co., the publishers of the Alcott books in England. When they were in London Louisa and May often called at the office of the firm, and Mr. Marston remembers they were both bright and cheerful, for at that time both were at the height of their success, the one as a writer, the other as an artist.

Altogether the year of travel had been successful and pleasant. Louisa had enjoyed the freedom from small cares and the delightful society in which they found themselves, for the author of "Little Women" had a warm welcome everywhere. The two younger girls were made much of and petted, and May's

talent brought her into close association with the foremost painters and sculptors of the day. John Ruskin was much interested in her copies of the great Turner masterpieces, and warmly praised her colour and style.

But in spite of all these attractions, Louisa's health was much the same ; pain haunted her days, sleeplessness troubled her nights ; her naturally lively disposition and hopeful spirit kept her going, and perhaps it was as well that she could forget her aches in the distraction of new scenes. She had a most unpleasant voyage home. Smallpox broke out on board, and her cabin companion was struck down.

" I escaped," she writes in her journal, " but had a sober time lying next door to her, waiting to see if my turn was to come."

It took her twelve days to get home, and her father and Mr. Niles were on hand to meet her, with a great red placard announcing the publication of " Little Men " pinned up in the carriage, and the joyful tidings that fifty thousand of the books had been sold before it was out.

The book was certainly very popular, for every reader of " Little Women " must, of course, have " Little Men," and besides—there was a certain type of " small boy " who had probably never read " Little Women," boys of her nephews' age, or perhaps a little older. It was a story calculated to please all sizes and ages. There were chapters for the quiet ones, the studious ones, the gay ones and the sober ones. In the chapter called " Pranks and Plays " *Mrs. Jo* herself says :

"I beg leave to assure my honoured readers that most of the incidents are taken from real life, and that the oddest are the truest ; for no person, no matter how vivid an imagination he may have, can invent anything half so droll as the freaks and fancies that originate in the lively brains of little people."

The "Kitty-mouse and the 'sackerryfice'" was famous among the Alcott girls and their friends, and "Brops" was another absorbing play. "The Brops," Miss Alcott tells us, "is a winged quadruped with a human face of a youthful and merry aspect. When it walks the earth it grunts, when it soars it gives a shrill hoot ; occasionally it goes erect, and talks good English. Its body is usually covered with a substance much resembling a shawl, sometimes red, sometimes blue, often plaid, and strange to say—they frequently change skins with one another. On their heads they have a horn very like a stiff brown-paper lamplighter. Wings of the same substance flap from their shoulders when they fly ; this is never very far from the ground, as they usually fall with violence if they attempt any lofty flights. They browse over the earth, but can sit up and eat like the squirrel. Their favourite nourishment is the seed cake ; apples also are freely taken and sometimes raw carrots are nibbled when food is scarce. They live in dens, where they have a sort of nest, much like a clothes-basket, in which the little Brops play till their wings are grown. These singular animals quarrel at times, and it is on these occasions that they burst into human speech, call each other names, cry, scold, and some-

times tear off horns and skin, declaring fiercely that they 'won't play.' . . . "

This game was a great favourite, and the younger children beguiled many a rainy afternoon flapping or creeping about the nursery, acting like little Bedlamites, and being as merry as little grigs. To be sure it was rather hard upon clothes, particularly trouser knees and jacket elbows; but *Mrs. Bhaer* only said, as she patched and darned—she was always patching and darning—good *Mother Bhaer*:

"We do things just as foolish and not half so harmless. If I could get as much happiness out of it as the little dears do, I'd be a Brop myself."

There is something very sweet and true in the book, though you cannot lay your hand on the thread of a story, yet each chapter has its special centre of interest, and with the exception of "Little Women," it is the most popular of Miss Alcott's books. It is many years since the birth of "Little Men," and a number of the little men who read it then have grown sons now who read it in their turn, and some of a later generation are reading it, indeed, in the same dilapidated volumes that their fathers pored over, with the same thumb marks, the same dog-eared pages, the same favourite, much-worn spots.

But the children of to-day have the advantage over the earlier readers, for those first publications were unattractive little volumes, with the most ridiculous pictures. Those pictures were bitter pills to poor Louisa, who had artistic ideas, even though not artist herself, but as they made no difference in the sale of the book, she put up with them,

though she wailed to her publishers. It was many years later before a real artist, with some understanding of children, came to her help. This was Mary Halleck Foote, whose fine drawings are no less famous than her beautiful stories.

In 1877, six years after the publication of "Little Men," Louisa wrote to Mrs. Dodge of *St. Nicholas*, about "Under the Lilacs," which she was writing as a serial for that magazine :

" I will send you the first few chapters during the week, for Mrs. Foote [for illustration], and with them the schedule you suggest, so that my infants may not be drawn with whiskers, and my big boys and girls in pinafores, as in 'Eight Cousins.' I hope the new baby won't be set aside too soon for my illustrations, but I *do* feel a natural wish to have one story prettily adorned with good pictures as, hitherto, artists have much afflicted me. . . . I shall expect the small tots to be unusually good, since the artist has a live model to study from. Please present my congratulations to the happy mamma and Mr. Foote, Jr.

Yours *warmly*,

" L. M. A."

This was part of a letter written from Concord on June 3rd, and the summer heat of the good little town was often unendurable.

But as years went on, publishers began to think a little about the "make up" of a book, so that pretty covers and interesting pictures might count for something, and the more recent editions of Miss Alcott's books show a great improvement, in which no one would have rejoiced more sincerely than the

author herself. "Little Men" in particular has passed through the hands of Reginald Birch, who has adorned it with a host of pretty, chubby children, black-stockinged little boys and girls, and even the heavy-browed "rough-and-tumble" *Dan* has lost his terrors; many "old-timers" regret this, for he was a most delightful and blood-curdling villain according to the other pictures.

Louisa found that her fame had only slumbered during the year of travel. The new book made her more sought after than ever, and it took all her cleverness to dodge the people who would make a "lioness" of her.

She found her mother very feeble and much aged by this last trouble. Though she had made no complaint, she had sadly missed her two daughters, and Louisa determined never to go far away from her again.

"Nan—well and calm," she writes in her journal, "but under her sweet serenity is a very sad soul, and she mourns for her mate like a tender turtle-dove.

"The boys are tall, bright lads, devoted to Marmee, and the life of the house. . . . Much company and loads of letters, all full of good wishes and welcome. . . .

"A happy month, for I felt well for the first time in two years. I knew it wouldn't last, but enjoyed it heartily while it did, and was grateful for rest from pain and a touch of the old cheerfulness. It was much needed at home."

But July, August, and September were trying months, with too much company and care, and the

death of her favourite uncle, Dr. S. J. May, helped to upset the poor nerves again. In October she went to Boston, for, from the time her health began to fail, Concord never agreed with her.

It was nearly ten years since Louisa, a hearty, healthy, energetic young woman, had set bravely forth, to serve her country at the hospital ; and since that time she had never drawn a well breath, though she had fought for health as bravely as any soldier for freedom.

She would not give up—that was the trouble. Deprived of bodily strength, that active, vigorous mind of hers worked harder than ever, and this was bad for her though she did not recognize it then. She was always "keyed up" to some great effort ; her family looked to her as their mainstay ; the public demanded story after story ; the children in particular were never satisfied, and the luxury of a private secretary and a typewriter was not dreamed of in those days. She not only thought out her stories, but she wrote them out, until the pen sometimes dropped from the cramped fingers. Poor Louisa ! when she had health and strength, she had nothing else but hope. Now she had everything but health and strength, even hope would not be quenched, though the tired nerves nearly gave up hoping some times. Then would come a bright, grateful letter from some jolly girl or boy, which pleased her more than all the calls and requests for autographs, and she would think the pain and trouble worth while, if they brought her such rewards.

"Little Men" proved a great lump of added

prosperity. The first thing she did was to set aside a sum for Anna and the boys, to be invested in a home later on. Then she planned comforts for the old house in Concord, while she "rested up" in Boston, enjoying people, pictures, plays, reading all she could, and trying to forget the aching bones.

In November, she writes in her journal: "May sent pleasant letters and some fine copies of Turner. She decides to come home as she feels she is needed, as I give out. Marmee is feeble, Nan has her boys and her sorrow, and one strong head and hand is wanted at home. A year and a half of holiday is a good deal, and duty comes first always. Sorry to call her back, but her eyes are troublesome, and housework will rest them and set her up. Then she can go again when I am better, for I don't want her to be thwarted in her work more than just enough to make her want it very much."

She came back to them like a streak of sunlight, bringing new life into the quiet house. There was something radiant about May Alcott, which was her peculiar charm. Unlike Louisa, she never lost a certain air of youth, which shone in her fair face and golden hair, her vivacity, and her light springiness of motion. She was a girl always, and her sister took great pride in her and her beautiful work.

In December, she writes, evidently from Boston: "Enjoyed my quiet, sunny room very much, and this lazy life seems to suit me, for I am better, mind and body. All goes well at home, with May to run the machine in her cheery, energetic style, and amuse Marmee and Nan with gay histories. Had a furnace put in, and all enjoyed the new climate.

Letter from MAY ALCOTT to EDWARD MARSTON

Dear Mr Marston

I sent a note by
Mr Chase the other day
asking for the rest of the
Magazine money, & as to the
state of my sisters account
with your firm will you
kindly forward another
copy of "note" to me as Miss
Alcott desires me sent to
a friend in London. I often
is a cheaper form, such will
answer the answer the purpose
Mr Miles writes me he has
sent by post to your care one
of the American edition con-
taining illustrations ^{for me} but it
hasn't as yet appeared here
Today I received a pretty
note from Miss Florence
Ponsonby, Ashbourne Hall,
Derbyshire evidently a little

you very much in love with Miss
Alcott & all her books & under
the impression I am she shall
send it to Louisa tho she has
had several from England before
but it certainly shows a growing
interest for her books this side
of the water. I saw in our literary
world "the account of my adventures
with the young gipsy or enthusiastic
concerning 'Little Homer'" & also that
Mr. Giles uses it as an advertisement.
How infinitely finer your style of paper
& binding is of all three books to
the cheaper American edition. Are you
ready for another Alcott novel
of It will write one?

Believe me

W. m. haste

May Alcott

June 30th / 3

No 21, Roburn Place

No more rheumatic fevers and colds, with picturesque open fires. Mother is to be cosy if money can do it. She seems to be now, and my long-cherished dream has come true; for she sits in a pleasant room, with no work, no care, no poverty to worry, but peace and comfort all about her, and children, glad and able to stand between trouble and her. Thank the Lord! I like to stop and remember my mercies. Working and waiting for them makes them very welcome."

Indeed, if the early life of hardship and privation had not told upon her, "Marmee" would have been blessed above most women. She had surely earned her reward, and seventy years is really but the beginning of old age, but like Louisa, her energy had far outrun her strength, and she was a feeble old lady long before her time.

This holiday season was bravely kept up by the Alcotts; grief was never nursed and fostered among them, and so Louisa tells us of "a merry Christmas at home, with a tree for the boys, a family dinner, and frolic in the evening."

There were hosts of young cousins from Boston who were continually dropping in upon them; there was coasting, and skating on the frozen Concord River; there were tramps in the keen winter air, led by energetic May, while Louisa, from her home nest, sighed longingly for the fun. She knew every rivulet, every frozen, winding path through the Concord woods, and many a time, I fear, she cast prudence to the winds and went with the others; but of this there is no record. However, when they frolicked at night, she it was who planned the games,

arranged charades, and gave them convulsing character sketches, sparing not even the grave philosophers, who enjoyed it all as much as the youngest revellers.

"A varied, but on the whole, a good year, in spite of pain," she writes. "Last Christmas we were in Rome, mourning for John. What will next Christmas bring forth? I have no ambition now but to keep the family comfortable and not ache any more. Pain has taught me patience, I hope—if nothing else."

January, 1872, came in laden with royalties, for "Little Women" and "Little Men" alone were coining money, and old-fashioned *Polly* was close behind in popularity. "More, more, more!" cried the greedy public. "More, more, more!" echoed the greedier children, and Louisa, who always listened to her children, wrung her hands and wished she had stayed abroad another year. Her admirers still haunted her, and one infatuated unknown being began to send her daily offerings of lovely flowers, which flavour of romance and mystery she greatly enjoyed.

During February and March she wrote "Shawl Straps," which was first published in the *Christian Union*, and during April and May she writes:

"Wrote another sketch for the *Independent*, 'A French Wedding,' and the events of my travels paid my expenses. All is fish that comes to the literary net. Goethe put his joys and sorrows into poems; I turn my adventures into bread and butter.

"June, 1872. Home—and begin a new task. Twenty years ago I resolved to make the family

independent, if I could. At forty [not quite, Louisa, if you are accurate] that is done. Debts are paid . . . and we have enough to be comfortable. It has cost me my health, perhaps, but as I still live, there is more for me to do, I suppose."

And so there was, hundreds of stories to be written, many sweet little heroes and heroines to go into a big world of readers and hold lasting places in their hearts, struggling fellow-workers to be helped by word and deed, a thousand unnamed kindnesses to be scattered broadcast, without thought of thanks or reward. A sister she was to all struggling girls and boys, the ruling spirit of her home, a strong prop for Anna in her loneliness, and a real father, as she promised to be, to her "little men."

CHAPTER XV

PROGRESS AND PROSPERITY

HAD Louisa been willing to supply the demand for books and stories, she would have found it simply impossible, for there was scarcely an editor or a publisher who would not have paid a great deal for anything she wrote. Had she lived in these days she could have kept several secretaries and typewriters busily employed, while she went from one to the other dashing off her stories. But she was too independent for that sort of thing. We must bear in mind that the *Goose* she mentions in her poem not only *laid* the golden eggs, but *hatched* them ; and so with Louisa during the next six years, she not only planned her stories, but she prepared them for publication, and in the case of "Work" she wrote three pages at once on impression paper—one for Henry Ward Beecher, who had ordered the story as a serial for the *Christian Union* ; one for Roberts Brothers, who were waiting to publish it in book form, and the third for Sampson Low, Marston & Company, of London, for her books were now in great demand in England. From this exploit she had paralysis of her thumb, from which she never recovered.

"Work" was a story with a history. When

Mr. Beecher asked for a serial, Louisa remembered a tale she had commenced years ago and had named "Success." She had put it aside and forgotten it in the hurry of other matters, but now she took it from its pigeon-hole and considered it seriously. *Christie Devon* was good material to build upon. Through this heroine she could tell much of her own life and struggles, and as the *Christian Union* offered her three thousand dollars for the completed manuscript, advancing a thousand dollars as a seal to the bargain, she could not resist. She says in her journal :

"Fired up the engine and plunged into a vortex, with many doubts about getting out. Can't work slowly ; the thing possesses me, and I must obey till it's done, . . . so I was bound, and sat at the oar like a galley slave."

May took charge of things at home during the summer and autumn of 1872, making a charming hostess to the innumerable guests who invaded *Orchard House*, while the hunted authoress "flew around behind the scenes or skipped out of the back window when ordered out for inspection by the inquisitive public. . . .

"Reporters sit on the wall and take notes, artists sketch me as I pick pears in the garden, and strange women interview Johnny as he plays in the orchard. It looks like impertinent curiosity to me, but it is called 'fame' and considered a blessing to be grateful for, I find. Let 'em try it."

Again her trials as an authoress were vividly described by a few clever rhymes which she wrote at this time on the subject of fame :

There is a town of high repute,
 Where saints and sages dwell,
 Who in these latter days are forced
 To bid sweet peace farewell.
 For all their men are demigods,
 So rumour doth declare,
 And all the women are De Staëls,
 And genius fills the air.

So eager pilgrims penetrate
 To their most private nooks,
 Storm their back doors in search of news,
 And interview their cooks.
 Worship at ev'ry victim's shrine,
 See halos round their hats,
 Embalm the chickweed from their yards,
 And photograph their cats.

Alas ! what can the poor souls do ?
 Their homes are homes no more,
 No washing-day is sacred now,
 Spring cleaning's never o'er.
 Their doorsteps are the strangers' camp,
 Their trees bear many a name,
 Artists their very nightcaps sketch,
 And this—and this, is fame !

" *September.* To Walcott with Father and Fred. A quaint, lovely old place is the little house on Spindle Hill, where the boy Amos dreamed the dreams that have come true at last. Got hints for my novel, 'The Cost of an Idea'—if I ever have time to write it.

"Don't wonder the boy longed to climb those hills and see what lay beyond."

She never did write the novel, but after a glimpse of those "everlasting hills" and the old home, the simple story of her father's boyhood took root in her mind, and "Eli's Education" was the result, a

warm and loving memory of the studious country lad, whose ideals in early youth were no more beautiful or fair than those of the white-haired scholar, who still looked upward toward them.

In October, Miss Alcott went to Boston. "I can't work at home," she says, "and need to be alone to spin like a spider. Rested; walked; to the theatre now and then. Home once a week with books, etc., for Marmee and Nan. Prepared 'Shawl Straps' for Roberts."

"*November*. Forty—on the 29th. Got Father off for the West, all neat and comfortable. I enjoyed every penny spent, and had a happy time, packing his new trunk with warm flannels, neat shirts, gloves, etc., and seeing the dear man go off in a new suit, overcoat, hat, and all, like a gentleman. We both laughed over the pathetic old times, with tears in our eyes, and I reminded him of the 'poor as poverty, but serene as heaven' saying." It was after her father's departure that she began "Work." *Christie* was an old friend, but the rough copy of bygone days was not to be considered, so she began at the beginning, "pulling down and building up" as fast as she could. The old reckless speed of fourteen hours a day could not be thought of now. Louisa was obliged to be prudent, she dared not let the "vortex" get the better of her; sleep and exercise were necessary, and regular meals a rule in the game; consequently the story went forward at a slower pace. She writes in her journal, January, 1873:

"Getting on well with 'Work'; have to go slowly for fear of a breakdown. . . . Roberts

Brothers paid me over two thousand dollars for books. S. E. S. invested most of it with the thousand F. sent. Gave C. M. a hundred dollars, a thank-offering for my success. I like to help the class of 'silent poor' to which we belonged for so many years—needy, but respectable, and forgotten because too proud to beg. Work difficult to find for such people, and life made very hard for want of a little money to ease the necessary needs."

In February, came an interruption in the shape of Anna's serious illness; she had pneumonia and came so very near dying that Mr. Alcott was sent for by the frightened family.

"She gave me the boys," writes Louisa, "but the dear saint got well, and kept the lads for herself. Thank God! Back to my work with what wits nursing left me.

"Had Johnny for a week to keep all quiet at home. Enjoyed the sweet little soul very much and sent him back much better."

Children were a delight to Louisa, and her small nephews were a constant pleasure. She "mothered" them quite as well as Anna herself, and no doubt Johnny's visit did her as much good as it did him.

She finished "Work" by the end of March, having started in November. "Not quite what it should be," she says; "too many interruptions. Should like to do one book in peace, and see if it wouldn't be good."

It pleased her readers, however. "Work" has always been a popular book, though much older in style than its predecessors. Had it been published

before " Little Women," it certainly would not have pushed its author to the front, but coming as it did, in answer to the public demand, it was eagerly read, and many recognized at once how true to her own life and work was the character of *Christie Devon*; strong of purpose, fearless in her determination to go forth and win for herself a place in the world. She shows *Christie* as *she* would have been, with no kith nor kin to shelter her when the battle turned against her. In many places the book is over-serious, and some of her younger readers criticised freely. The suicide of poor, crazy *Helen Campbell* disturbed them greatly, and Miss Alcott answered one of these plaintive wails :

" I did not like the suicide in ' Work,' " she wrote, " but as much of that chapter was true, I let it stand as a warning to several people who need it, to my knowledge, and to many whom I do not know. I have already had letters from strangers thanking me for it, so I am not sorry it went in. One must have both the light and dark side to paint life truly."

" Work " contains twenty chapters, and takes *Christie* from her twenty-first birthday to her fortieth, which puts the story at once a trifle out of the reach of " little men and women " ; the thoughtful girl, the sober boy from sixteen to twenty, will appreciate it, and older heads still see much that is fine and good in it. Louisa was writing her own biography, and from the time she was twenty-one she struggled as *Christie* did ; what she says of her heroine applies to herself :

" Twenty-one to-morrow, and her inheritance a

head, a heart, a pair of hands ; also the dower of most New England girls—intelligence, courage, and common sense, and many practical gifts hidden under the reserve which soon melts in a genial atmosphere, much romance and enthusiasm, and the spirit which can rise to heroism when the great moment comes."

This New England girl began at the bottom, and in her experience as a servant, Miss Alcott has faithfully recorded her own unpleasant trial, even to the polishing of her master's boots ; it was at this point that Louisa rebelled, but poor *Christie* was differently situated ; she had no " Marmee " to turn to as a refuge, so she had to bring forth all her philosophy and learn to polish boots properly.

As an actress, *Christie* touches closely on Louisa's life ; all the trials, temptations, wild ambitions, and rude awakening are true to life. Even her favourite Dickens was patronized by *Christie*.

As governess, companion, seamstress, surely Miss Alcott's own experience told the tale of *Christie's*, even in her despairing moments, which were so closely related to the time when Louisa's resolute heart failed her, when manuscripts " came home to roost," or the tired fingers and back ached with the dreary, endless stitching.

In speaking of " Work " Miss Alcott said to a friend : "*Christie's* adventures are many of them my own ; *Mr. Power* is Mr. Parker, *Mrs. Wilkins* is imaginary, and all the rest." This may be true, and yet in the character of *David Sterling* there is a strong suggestion of her old friend Thoreau. His love of all growing things and outdoor life, his

name, his gentle ways, his sturdy patriotism, and above all his playing of the flute. Louisa put her poem "Thoreau's Flute," in beautiful prose, in the chapter called "Little Heartsease."

As might have been expected, "Work" sold well, and though criticised more than any of her stories, she felt that her labour had not been in vain.

In April, she went home to take May's place, and sent her back to London, happy and independent, with a gift of a thousand dollars for another year of study. She had spent seven months in Boston, had written "a book and ten tales, earned three thousand two hundred and fifty dollars by my pen, and am satisfied with my winter's work."

Feeling unable to do active home work, which had always been such a rest to her tired brain, and unwilling to put up with the trifling of servants, Miss Alcott decided to get a nice American woman, who could cook and help her with the housework, and the treasure she secured made the family rejoice.

"Peace fell upon our troubled souls, and all went well. Good meals, tidy house, cheerful service, and in the P.M. an intelligent young person to read and sew with us. It was curious how she came to us; she had taught and sewed, and was tired, and wanted something else; decided to try for a house-keeper's place, but happened to read "Work" and thought she'd do as *Christie* did—take anything that came. I was the first who answered her advertisement, and when she found I wrote the book, she said: 'I'll go and see if Miss Alcott practises as she preaches.'"

Feeling care-free in such capable hands, Louisa

and little Johnny went to the seaside for a week, but were summoned home by the alarming illness of Mrs. Alcott. For three weeks she hovered at death's door, unconscious most of the time, and those who loved her best feared she would slip away, but she came slowly back to life, the shadow of great change upon her.

Louisa saw this at once; the brave, energetic "Marmee" was gone for ever, and in her place, a feeble old woman who knew that she must now tread the downward path. They all knew it, too, father and daughters, and they strove to keep the skies sunny and the way easy for the tired feet. It was all they could do for one whose life service had been for them.

When Louisa faced sorrow, it was always with bravery. Death did not mean the end of things to her; love lived always, and the family tie was too strong to be broken. However, "Marmee" was not to leave them yet, and they rejoiced over her improvement. During the late summer and early autumn she was able to take quiet drives with Louisa, and her birthday, the 8th of October, was celebrated merrily. Miss Alcott made a little story about it which she called "A Happy Birthday," and invested the fifty dollars it brought in drives for the invalid.

She determined to move the family to Boston for the winter, as Concord was always cold and bleak. She found sunny, cheerful rooms, and a nice school for the boys, while the three tired women "rested up" after the hard spring and summer. This being a sort of hospital trip for

"Marmee" and Anna, to say nothing of herself, Louisa did little or no work. "Pot-boilers" of course she did not count; once given an idea it was easy enough to rush into a story, and from November to April she earned a thousand dollars in that easy fashion. But her mother had another severe illness, and Louisa had a heartache. Her sympathy turned toward her father. In some way his philosophy, his sweet patience, had never brought him his reward, and to Louisa it seemed rather hard that *she* should have the fame, and *he* the crumbs. She began to think the world a little out of gear. She writes:

"When I had the youth, I had no money; now I have the money I have no time; and when I get the time, if I ever do, I shall have no health to enjoy life. I suppose it's the discipline I need; but it's rather hard to love the things I do, and see them go by because duty chains me to my galley. If I ever come into port with all sail set, that will be reward, perhaps. Life always was a puzzle to me, and gets more mysterious as I go on. I shall find it out by and by, and see that it's all right, if I can only keep brave and patient to the end."

It was not often of late years that Louisa spoke so freely in her journal about her own thoughts and feelings. As a child and a growing girl, she had found the pages of her diary helpful reminders of duty. The solemn, questioning little girl was feeling her course and liked to trace it with her pen, but the real cares of life had left her little time for self-examination. Instead, as we can see, she read

her Emerson, and profited by his teaching. This dear friend was her idol still, and the self-reliant, heroic young woman, so nobly carrying the family burdens, no doubt inspired the philosopher, for he admired her greatly. Perhaps it was of her he thought when he wrote in his essay on "Heroism," which every girl should read :

"Let the maiden with erect soul walk serenely on her way, accept the hint of each new experience, search in turn all the objects that solicit her eye, that she may learn the power and charm of her new-born being, which is the kindling of a new dawn in the recesses of space. . . . Oh, friend, never strike sail to a fear! Come into port greatly, or sail with God the seas. Not in vain you live, for every passing eye is cheered and refined by the vision."

This was Louisa, heart and soul, as those who loved her knew.

The return of May in the spring, laden with rich spoils from her year's study, enlivened the household as usual. She brought with her lovely sketches and copies of Turner and her sister gloried in her success. They stayed in Boston long enough to erect a tablet to their Grandmother May, which they took their mother to see.

"A pathetic sight," writes the daughter, "to see father walk up the aisle with the feeble old wife on his arm, as they went to be married nearly fifty years ago. . . . Several old ladies came in and knew Mother. She broke down, thinking of the time when she and her mother and sisters, and father and brothers all went to church together, and we took her home, saying : ' This isn't my Boston ; all

my friends are gone. I never want to see it any more.' And she never did."

Poor old lady ! The last of a large family, sitting there, thinking of the past ! Is it a wonder that she broke down ?

After they were settled again at Concord Louisa ran away to Boston by herself, and started work in earnest. The Elgin Watch Company offered her a gold watch or a hundred dollars for a story. She chose the money, and wrote " My Rococo Watch," which was published later in the " Spinning Wheel Series." She had now become such a sought-after person that the publishers began to quarrel over her unwritten stories.

" I rather enjoyed it," she writes, " and felt important with Roberts, Sampson Low, and Scribner all clamouring for my 'umble work.' No peddling poor little manuscripts now and feeling rich with ten dollars ! The golden goose can sell her eggs for a good price, if she isn't killed by too much driving."

The " unwritten story " she speaks about was evidently " Eight Cousins," which she finished in December, and which was published in serial form in *St. Nicholas*. On the first page is this inscription :

To

The many boys and girls, whose letters it has been impossible to answer, this book is dedicated as a peace offering, by their friend

L. M. ALCOTT.

Miss Alcott has never written a more charming, wholesome tale. She gives us a glimpse of Boston and the harbour, she throws a bit of the sea in, with a strong Scotch flavour and true American accent,

and we like the mixture. There are boys, boys, boys everywhere ; she glories in them, she revels in them, and *Uncle Alec* is the biggest boy of them all.

In a certain sense none of the characters has any real foundation. The golden-haired, blue-eyed heroine, *Rose*, bears a strong likeness to May, and *Uncle Alec* has a great deal of Louisa herself tucked away in his old bachelor's heart. Beyond a doubt, the aunts were all funny portraits of people she knew, and the boys, jolly, hearty fellows, were like all other boys the world over.

Louisa turned herself loose in this happy meadow of youth, picking the prettiest flowers she could find for her boys and girls. We love *Rose*, with her grace, her kindness, her generosity ; and the strong, capable *Phæbe*, with her dark hair and black eyes and her beautiful voice ; and the kind old aunts, with the simple, old-fashioned ways, and all the rest of them ; and we are glad that Miss Alcott, in her preface, has promised us a sequel—that we are not to say good-bye to the Campbell Clan just yet, that there is to be a “*Rose in Bloom*,” some day not far off. “*Eight Cousins*” found its niche at once ; the boys and girls to whom it was dedicated felt pacified in spite of the unanswered letters.

I fancy Louisa enjoyed the education of this motherless and fatherless little *Rose* ; she put a good many of her own ideas in *Uncle Alec's* wise head. It was his opinion that if *Rose* had a good grip of the “three R's” she would do pretty well. “Let us be thorough,” he said, “no matter how slowly we go.” He objected to the fashionable school-teacher, who “crammed her pupils like Thanksgiving

turkeys, instead of feeding them in a natural and wholesome way."

"As figures are rather important things to most of us," he suggested, when *Rose* showed him a dilapidated account book, "wouldn't it be wise to begin at once and learn to manage your pennies before the pounds come to perplex you?"

That *Rose* liked her simple, everyday lessons we take for granted, when she answers with a mixture of fun and earnestness:

"You shall teach me, and when I am a woman we will set up a school where nothing but the three R's shall be taught, and all the children live on oatmeal, and the girls have waists a yard round."

He believed in fun, too, and plenty of it, and not one of the boys was keener for a frolic than *Dr. Alec*, always planning pleasant surprises when *Rose* most longed for it. He would smile and say: "Half the children's pleasure consists in having their fun *when* they want it." And surely never in one book was crowded so much innocent happiness and fun, so many helpful lessons of love and sacrifice, for Miss Alcott wished to show that boys and girls, no matter what their station, nor how wealthy they may be, have still their part to play in the work-a-day world, which they can make the brighter and better, through "little deeds of kindness." After finishing "Eight Cousins" she arranged for the writing of "Silver Pitchers," which was to be not only a Centennial story, but a temperance tale. There is not much in it, but it paid well and went well; Louisa herself did not care for it. "Poor

stuff," she says, "but the mill must keep on grinding—even chaff."

It was not often she disliked her literary children. Generally she loved them, though she recognized their faults, but the "written-to-order" kind of story she never cared for. There was included in this volume, which has recently been republished in the "Spinning Wheel Series," under the title of "Silver Pitchers," eight other tales more or less interesting. "My Rococo Watch," "Letty's Tramp," and "Transcendental Wild Oats" are the best among them. The last-mentioned story being true from start to finish, indeed, a graphic account of the *Fruitlands* experiment, told in Louisa's most humorous vein, with a dash of real sentiment here and there, like a streak of gold.

Feeling that she had earned, if not a vacation, at least a recess, she ran up to Vassar, where she talked to four hundred girls, wrote in stacks of albums and school books, and kissed every one who asked her. From Vassar she went to New York, where she stayed but a short while, but she adds in her journal: "Things look rather jolly, and I may try a winter there sometime, as I need a change and new ideas."

By March, she was home again getting ready for the Centennial celebration of the Concord Fight, when Paul Revere took his famous ride, and the "British regulars fired and fled." As usual she forgot herself in the enthusiasm and excitement, the result being "general *breakdown*, owing to an unwise desire to outdo all the other towns; too many people."

June, July, and August she generally served up

Letter from LOUISA ALCOTT to SAMPSON LOW & Co. (1875)

Concord Mar. 20th

Sampson Low & Co.

Gentlemen.

Your letter with
check & accounts has just reached
me as I was preparing to ask
why I did not hear from you.

The state of my mother's
health will not allow me to
undertake anything of importance
at present but I have collected
some of my short stories into
a volume to be brought out this
spring.

Mr. Miles thought some
short, named tales would sell well
this summer when all the world is
to be travelling, & as these stories are

~~Love stories~~ for grown people
they might do well for light-
reading. The book is not to be
in the Scrap Bag series but
a separate affair & as the
titles have all been well re-
ceived in papers & magazines,
I hope they will "go" in the
new form.

I began a Centennial
love-story to be the size of
"One Summer"; but had to give
it up as home duties made
some writing on impossibility.

Do you want this volume, ^{of titles,} for
English readers? It is in the print-
ers hands & Mr. Viles will forward
proof at once if you desire it.
Please let him know.

Very Truly Yours
L. M. Alcott.

together in her journal, and that season of 1875 she writes: "Keep house at home, with two Irish incapables to trot after, and ninety-two guests in one month to entertain. Fame is an expensive luxury; I can do without it. This is my worst scrape, I think. I asked for bread and got a stone—in the shape of a pedestal."

But in a certain way she liked her popularity, if it did not walk unbidden into her home circle. She gives a humorous description of a Women's Congress she attended at Syracuse in September, 1875:

"Funny time with the girls. Write loads of autographs, dodge at the theatre, and am kissed to death by gushing damsels. One energetic lady grasped my hand in the crowd, exclaiming: 'If you ever come to Oshkosh, your feet will not be allowed to touch the ground; you will be borne in the arms of the people! Will you come?' 'Never,' responded Miss Alcott, trying to look affable, and dying to laugh, as the good soul worked my arm like a pump-handle, and from the gallery, generations of girls were looking on. This—this is fame!"

Before going home, she visited Niagara, and again stopped in New York, where she had a most delightful visit. The great city with its hurry and bustle gave her the change she longed for, the brain tonic that she needed. No two days of her stay were alike, she was welcomed in literary and social circles. She caught glimpses of the very rich in their homes. of the very poor who had no homes at all. She went to receptions, lectures, concerts, operas, theatres.

She visited the Tombs, Newsboys' Home, and on Christmas Day went to Randall's Island with her sweet old Quaker friend, Mrs. Abby Gibbons. These last expeditions she enjoyed more than all the parties or dinners. But even though a giddy person, she is also "a thrifty butterfly" as she writes to her father, "having written three stories, which included a 'girl paper' for *St. Nick*, while several other papers were waiting for tales."

"So far," she adds, "I like New York very much, and feel so well I shall stay on till I'm tired of it. People begin to tell me how much better I look than when I came, and I have not an ache to fret over. This, after such a long lesson in bodily ails, is a blessing for which I am duly grateful."

The next letter to her little nephews describes her visit to the Newsboys' Home, which she enjoyed immensely. One hundred and eighty boys swarming about her was a delight in itself and a welcome experience. She speaks specially of "one little chap, only six, who trotted around, busy as a bee, putting his small shoes and ragged jacket in one of the lockers. I asked about little Pete and the man told us his brother, only nine, supported him and took care of him entirely and wouldn't let Pete be sent away to any home, because he wished to have his 'family' with him.

"Think of that, Fred! How would it seem to be all alone in a big city, with no mamma to cuddle you; no two grandpas' houses to take you in; not a penny but what you earned, and Donny to take care of? Could you do it? Nine-year old Patsey

does it capitably ; buys Pete's clothes, pays for his bed and supper, and puts pennies in the savings bank. There's a brave little man for you !

" . . . The savings bank was a great table full of slits, each one leading to a little place below and numbered outside, so each boy knew his own. Once a month the bank is opened, and the lads take out what they like or have it invested in a big bank for them to have when they find homes out West as many do, and make good farmers. A boy was putting in some pennies as we looked, and I asked how much he had saved this month. ' Fourteen dollars, ma'am,' said the thirteen-year-old, proudly slipping in the last cent. A prize of three dollars is offered to the lad who saves the most in a month."

She closes her letter to the boys with the following bright and humorous description of the going-to-bed arrangements. " At nine, the word ' Bed ! ' was given, and," she winds up, " away went the lads, trooping up to sleep in shirts and trousers, as nightgowns are not provided. How would a boy I know like that ?—a boy who likes to have ' trommin ' on his nighties. Of course, I don't mean Dandy Don ! Oh, dear, no ! "

Her visit to Randall's Island, on Christmas Day, was full of interest, though her heart ached for the little " forlornities " she saw there. There is no doubt that her generous hands opened wide with the joy of giving, but she has no word of that, only praise and admiration for the sweet Quaker couple, who were beloved through the length and breadth of the island.

She writes in a letter to her family: "One of the teachers in the idiot home was a Miss C., who remembered Nan at Dr. Wilbur's. Very ladylike and all devotion to me. But such a life! Oh, me! Who *can* lead it and not go mad?"

"At four we left and came home, Mrs. Gibbons giving a box of toys and sweeties on board the boat, for the children of the men who own it. So leaving a stream of blessings and pleasures behind her, the dear old lady drove away, simply saying: 'There, now; I shall feel better for the next year.' Well she may, bless her!"

"She made a speech to the chapel children, . . . and told them that *she* should come as long as she could, and when she was gone her children would still keep it up in memory of her; so for thirty years more she hoped this, their one holiday, would be made happy for them. I could have hugged her on the spot, the motherly old dear!"

" . . . I got home at five, and then remembered I'd had no lunch; so I took an apple till six, when I discovered that all had dined at one, so the helpers could go early this evening. Thus my Christmas Day was without dinner or presents, for the first time since I can remember. Yet it has been a very memorable day, and I feel as if I'd had a splendid feed, seeing the poor babies wallow in turkey and soup, and that every gift I put into their hands had come back to me in the dumb delight of their unchildlike faces trying to smile."

Altogether, Louisa's visit to New York was a great success. At forty-three, she was not too old to enjoy the pageant of the great city, and this she

did most thoroughly, while, as we see, she looked deep down into the heart of the sober side, doing what she could to help along, and she went back to Boston feeling all the better, physically and mentally, for her contact with this outside world.

CHAPTER XVI

MORE LITERARY CHILDREN

DURING the summer of 1876, which was spent in Concord nursing her mother, now constantly ill, Louisa had a busy time. Here are some items from her journal, to show how hands and heart and brain were all in motion :

“ *June*—Lovely month ! Keep hotel and wait on Marmee.

“ Try to get up steam for a new serial, as Mrs. Dodge wants one, and Scribner offers three thousand dollars for it. Roberts Brothers want a novel ; and the various newspapers and magazines clamour for tales. My brain is squeezed dry, and I can only wait for help.

“ *July and August*—Get an idea and start ‘ Rose in Bloom,’ though I hate sequels.”

The Scribners at that time were the publishers of *St. Nicholas*. Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor-in-chief, was an intimate friend of Miss Alcott’s, so it was not remarkable that the children’s great magazine should make every effort to secure contributions from the children’s great writer, for there was now no doubt that, in her own line, Louisa had no equal. Though she never bound herself to any special publication, she is to be found very often in

the pages of *St. Nicholas*, and "Rose in Bloom" had long been promised to the enthusiastic young readers.

This mighty task of twenty-two chapters was accomplished in three weeks, and proved to be one of the sweetest and brightest of her stories. *Rose* as a grown-up heroine, is charming; the sort of girl we all love, the sort of woman men admire and reverence; and dark, splendid *Phæbe*, with the glorious voice, is a beautiful contrast; two royal girls full of life and youth and hope and noble purpose. But she has not neglected her boys; they have turned out fine clansmen, and even though *Charlie's* weakness got the upper hand, he was a handsome, lovable fellow, and many a secret sigh has been breathed at his shrine by romantic damsels, who admire the "bold and dashing" hero. In the studious *Mac* and quiet, steadfast *Archie*, she has fashioned two men worthy of her pen, while the other characters she has mellowed and broadened with the passing years.

It is so delightful to meet our old friends in this happy fashion, and when *Rose* comes home from Europe to take possession of her property, we feel that the "coming out" party is not the beginning and end of things for a rich and pretty girl.

The glimpses she had recently had of the enormous charities of a great city had given Louisa a weapon to put into the hands of her young heiress, whose good works take the shape of a home for gentlewomen, a hospital for sick babies, and best of all, the "Rose Garden," where the little creatures could toddle about in the fresh air. *Rose* even

adopts a little waif herself, a sad and solemn child with big wistful eyes, which had seen too much of the world's sorrow.

Miss Alcott is more romantic than usual in her love scenes, but she is specially happy when she comes close to Nature, in the chapter "Among the Hay-Cocks." It is full of the poetry of Keats, the ramblings of Thoreau, and the philosophy of Emerson, a fitting background to the budding love of a strong man and a fair girl. From that time began the unfolding of the petals from about the golden heart of the *Rose*, and Miss Alcott almost turns poet as she lingers over the sweet love story.

"Rose in Bloom" was published in November of the Centennial year, and went well from the first, taking its place among the most popular of her books. Before it was finished, May sailed again for another year of study abroad, a journey from which she never returned.

"God be with her!" writes Louisa, from a heart full of foreboding. "She has done her distasteful duty faithfully, and deserves a reward. She cannot find the help she needs here, and is happy and busy in her own world over there."

This time their "little Raphael" made many strides. "I am getting on," she wrote her home people, "and I feel as if it was not all a mistake, for I have some talent and will prove it," and her sister adds: "Modesty is a sign of genius, and I think our girl has both. The money I invest in her pays the sort of interest I like. I am proud to have her show what she can do, and have her depend on no one but me."

The winter of 1877 opened well. Anna kept house, and the boys, tall, fine lads, filled it with sunshine, Mr. Alcott was writing a book, "Marmee" was cosy with her sewing, her letters, and her "girls," so Louisa felt free to slip away to Boston for some weeks. Here, at the request of Roberts Brothers, she wrote a novel called "A Modern Mephistopheles" for their famous *No Name Series*. "It has been simmering ever since I read 'Faust' last year," she tells us. "Enjoyed doing it, being tired of providing moral pap for the young. Long to write a novel but cannot get time enough."

This was the result of one of her fits of rebellion. Louisa turned loose, pranced like a colt, having shaken off the halter; and she gave rein to that vivid, morbid fancy of hers, which in the early days had sold so many sensational "pot-boilers." Safely hidden, as to her identity, she enjoyed the mystery of her "Modern Mephistopheles," but it is fairly certain that she would never have allowed this queer child of hers to bear her name. The story is as weird as Goethe's "Faust" without its greatness; there is neither hope, nor light, nor joy in it. There is, of course, a moral, but the afflictions and catastrophes crowd so thick that the thread of gold is lost in the maze of evil. For the first time she fails to present life as she found it. She draws on her imagination and from what she has read.

Mrs. Cheney, in speaking of this work in the "Life and Letters," says: "We do not find Louisa Alcott's own broad, generous, healthy life, or that which lay around her in this book, but the reminiscences of her reading, which she had striven to

make her own by invention and fancy." In itself a fine bit of work, it adds nothing to Miss Alcott's fame as a writer, but it excited much comment and a great deal of guessing, which the author enjoyed most heartily.

The following letter to her publisher, Mr. Niles, shows the family feeling regarding the book :

" DEAR MR. NILES :

" I had to keep the proof longer than I meant, because a funeral came in the way.

" The book as last sent is lovely, and much bigger than I expected.

" Poor ' Marmee,' ill in bed, hugged it and said : ' It is perfect, only I do wish your name could be on it.' She is very proud of it ; and tender-hearted Anna weeps and broods over it, calling *Gladys* the best and sweetest character I ever did. So much for home opinion, now let's see what the public will say. May clamours for it, but I don't want to send this till she has had one or two of the others. [She refers to the novels which came out in the *No Name Series*.] Have you sent her ' Is That All ? ' If not, please do ; then it won't look suspicious to send only ' M. M.' [Modern Mephistopheles].

" I am so glad the job is done, and hope it won't disgrace the *Series*. Is not another to come before this ? I hope so, for many people suspect what is up. . . .

" Thanks for the trouble you have taken to keep the secret. Now the fun will begin.

" Yours truly,

" L. M. A."

It is plainly to be seen that while May might have known that her sister was writing a novel for the *Series*, she was not told the title of the story, and had therefore to pick it from among the many Roberts Brothers sent her as puzzles.

At last Louisa was able to carry out a cherished plan ; she helped Anna to buy the Thoreau place for herself and the boys, who were growing up fast and needed a home of their own, and the two sisters had happy times together beautifying the old-fashioned yellow house, where Thoreau had spent his last days, and which was full of the sweetest memories to them both.

" Helped to buy the house for Nan," writes Louisa, " so she has *her* wish and is happy. When shall I have mine ? Ought to be contented with knowing I help both sisters by my brains. But I'm selfish, and want to go away and rest in Europe. Never shall."

She put away her private woes, however, to rejoice in May's triumph. She had been through a hard winter of study in Paris, and at the request of her teacher, sent a bit of still life to the Salon. It was accepted, hung, and much praised by the judges. May was jubilant, her family scarcely less so, and the star of fame glimmered afar for the young artist, whose hard work and talent were beginning to be recognized.

May and June were passed happily and peacefully at Concord with the dear invalid, who grew more feeble each day, though she was still able to drive gently in a low basket phaeton through the beautiful woods she loved so well. Louisa forgot

her own ailments in the sweet companionship of those summer days. Indeed, she began to hope that her old enemy, neuralgia, had completely disappeared. Then it is to be feared that her energy got the better of her prudence, for in July she records :

“ Got too tired and was laid up for some weeks. A curious time, lying quite happily at rest, wondering what was to come next.”

In August, she felt better and began “ Under the Lilacs,” which was to make its bow in the autumn, as a serial in *St. Nicholas*.

In September, “ Marmee ” was much worse, and the two daughters, who watched her so anxiously, saw that the end was very near. No one knew what the parting meant to Louisa. Anna had her boys, May her pictures ; but *her* whole life had been one earnest endeavour to make her mother’s pathway easy, and to see her slipping away in the midst of prosperity, when luxuries could be had for the asking, was hard indeed.

All through their trials and their hardships “ Marmee’s ” had been the steadying hand upon the wheel. Her strength was not the calm of a serene philosopher like her husband, but the practical energy of an everyday, wide-awake woman, ready to help those she loved best out of every dilemma, never faltering when the way was rough and stony, as it was too often. In such cases she never waited for the stones to roll away ; she moved them herself, a strong, bright example for her little girls, who, one and all, inherited that courageous spirit. Louisa in particular, showed this influence from the day of small tasks till the great ones were finished.

The girls could never remember when "Marmee" was not brimming over with fun and a quaint humour. There were innumerable household sayings which came direct from her, and which have since grown into family proverbs ; there were funny anecdotes, to which only she could do justice. She was the soul of hospitality ; the fountain-head of every frolic. She had a quick temper under perfect control, which is better by far than a naturally even disposition which requires no effort at all to subdue, and she taught her girls this golden secret. In "Little Women" Louisa certainly paid royal tribute to her mother, for *Marmee* stands out in the story a portrait of wonderful light and colour. Indeed, every mother Miss Alcott created—and she was fond of writing about mothers—had "Marmee" for a model.

Had not Mrs. Alcott been such a busy woman she would probably have written, for she had a vivid imagination, keen humour, a poetic streak, and her journals, had they been preserved, would have given to the world interesting records of the family life. Her letters to her children were always simple and sincere, full of an earnest endeavour to lead them in the right way, and the little motherly notes tucked under her pillow did much for Louisa in forming the character of a restless, turbulent and often wayward little girl. So it was hard for those who loved her to stand by while the great soul struggled for release from the frail body.

Yet while Louisa watched and waited her brain was lively, and her pen flew. She wrote "My Girls" to go with other tales in a new "Scrap-Bag,"

and finished "Under the Lilacs," one of the brightest, liveliest, and youngest of her children. She says: "It always takes an exigency to spur me up and wring out a book. Never have time to go slowly and do my best." The nursing and anxiety were such a strain, that fearing she might break down at the last, Louisa got a nurse and rested a little.

She writes of her mother in October: "We thought she would not outlive her seventy-seventh birthday, but thanks to Dr. W. she got relief, and we had a sad little celebration, well knowing it would be the last. Aunt B. and L. W. came up with fruit and flowers, smiling faces and full hearts, and we sat around the brave soul, who faced death so calmly, and was ready to go.

"I overdid, and was very ill, in danger of my life for a week, and feared to go before 'Marmee.' But pulled through, and got up slowly to help her die. A strange month!"

In November, she was very feeble, and her mother failing fast. On the 14th, the two invalids were removed to Anna's new home, and, on the 25th, "Marmee" died quietly in Louisa's arms. Her daughter writes touchingly of the peaceful hour, while the rain fell gently in the Sabbath stillness and they sat watching the ebbing life.

"She was very happy all day, thinking herself a girl again with parents and sisters around her. Said her Sunday hymn to me, whom she called 'Mother,' and smiled at us, saying: 'A smile is as good as a prayer.' Looked often at the little picture of May and waved her hand to it. 'Good-bye, little May,

good-bye !' Her last words to Father were : ' You are laying a very soft pillow for me to go to sleep on.' "

She was buried in Sleepy Hollow, close beside Beth, and for a while the two daughters could only sit quietly by, " resting in her rest." The calm of a great despair seemed to fall upon Louisa.

" My duty is done," she writes, " now I shall be glad to follow. . . . I never wish her back, but a great warmth seems gone out of life, and there is no motive to go on now. My only comfort is that I *could* make her last years comfortable, and lift off the burden she had carried so bravely all these years. She was so loyal, tender, and true ; life was hard for her, and no one understood all she had to bear, but we, her children."

This sombre tone was not like Louisa. She was ill, she was passing through a deep grief, and she was weary in body and soul. But a month's reflection made her see things in a clearer light.

" Father goes about, being restless with his anchor gone. Dear Nan is house-mother now, so patient, thoughtful, and tender ; I need nothing but that cherishing which only mothers can give."

In the beautiful poem, called " Transfiguration," which she wrote in memory of her mother, Louisa showed to what heights her genius could soar when moved by a strong emotion. The last two verses show besides, the love and admiration her mother's character called forth :

Oh, noble woman ! never more a queen,
Than in the laying down
Of sceptre and of crown,
To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen.

Teaching us how to seek the highest goal,
To earn the true success,—
To live, to love, to bless,—
And make death proud to take a royal soul.

Both Louisa and her father had this singular trait ; when deeply moved by a great emotion or a great grief, they found that poetry came freely to their pens—not mere verse or rhyme, but truly inspired thought. “Thoreau’s Flute” and those beautiful lines just quoted would of themselves stamp Louisa as a poet, had she written nothing else. But the practical needs of life made her turn resolutely from the “Poet’s Corner” where

“Many a flow’r is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air,”

and where much praise and little money would have been her portion.

Her writing, as usual, proved her truest consolation. “Under the Lilacs,” which had been finished at her mother’s bedside, was hailed by the younger readers with delight. A boy, two girls, and a dog are enough to make any tale interesting, and *Sancho*, being such a wonderfully accomplished dog, was considered by many to be the hero of the story. This was the first time Louisa had ever indulged her love of animals in public, and she took a great deal of trouble in building her dog on regular circus lines, going to various shows where performing dogs were the attraction, in order that *Sancho*’s tricks should be true to life.

Accepting *Sancho*, then, as the hero, Louisa, while she certainly put many lifelike touches to her other

little characters, did not take them wholly from life ; there are many Babs and Bettys in the world ; many good, honest, independent Bens. The only " really " real person was the little six-year-old son of F. B. Sanborn, who, under the name of *Alfred Tennyson Barlow*, recited verses of his own composition in the chapter called " A Happy Tea." Here they are :

- " Sweet are the flowers of life,
Swept o'er my happy days at home ;
Sweet are the flowers of life,
When I was a little child.
- " Sweet are the flowers of life,
That I spent with my father at home ;
Sweet are the flowers of life,
When children played about the house.
- " Sweet are the flowers of life,
When the lamps are lighted at night ;
Sweet are the flowers of life,
When the flowers of summer bloomed.
- " Sweet are the flowers of life,
Dead are the snows of winter ;
Sweet are the flowers of life,
When the days of spring come on."

This was truly the production of Mr. Sanborn's little son at the age of six, and here is another fragment he composed, when " digging after turtles."

- " Sweet, sweet days are passing
O'er my happy home,
Passing on swift wings through the valley of life.
Cold are the days when winter comes again,
When my sweet days were passing at my happy home.
Sweet were the days on the rivulet's green brink,
Sweet were the days when I read my father's books ;
Sweet were the winter days when bright fires were
blazing."

The quaintness of the child, the queer chanting ring of the lines, caught Louisa's fancy, so she popped them into her story.

Her chief care being now her father, she determined that, though late in life, recognition should come to him at last, and it was chiefly through her planning and assistance that the long-dreamed-of School of Philosophy began to take shape. Mr. Alcott was to be the head of it all, and the school, a simple structure, was reared a few years later on the grounds of *Orchard House*. Here, each year, for several summer weeks, the philosophers would flock, to talk and speculate. Mrs. Cheney says of the school: "The opening was a great event to Mr. Alcott. . . . Louisa enjoyed his gratification and took pains to help him to reap full satisfaction from it. She carried flowers to grace the opening meeting, and was friendly to his guests. . . . She had not much faith in the experiment. Philosophy was associated in her mind with early poverty and suffering, and she did not feel its charms."

Another interest held her at this time, as bits from her journal will show: "May busy in London," she writes, the January after her mother's death. "Very sad about Marmee; but it was best not to send for her, and Marmee forbade it, and she has some *very* tender friends near her."

The sweet breath of this budding romance woke Louisa from her first dull grief, for May illustrated accurately the history of *Amy's* courtship and marriage in "Little Women." It was a pretty love story; the lonely, homesick girl, the handsome lover, and Louisa could not help rejoicing in her

happiness. She had long suspected the truth, for May had dropped many happy hints in her letters. Mr. Ernest Nieriker was a young Swiss whom May met in London, and between the two the romance began at once. He was very musical, and in the first sad days of May's sorrow his violin soothed her grief, and his quick sympathy touched her heart. In a short time they became engaged, just as in the case of *Amy* and *Laurie*, and the letters home were full of this new-found happiness. The marriage was very sudden; business called Mr. Nieriker away from London, and they decided that a hurried wedding was better than a long separation. The simple ceremony took place March 22nd, 1878, and in "After Work," Mr. E. Marston, of Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., Miss Alcott's English publishers, says that she and her husband "called on me just before they left London for Paris, the happiest couple that could be imagined." Louisa writes:

"A happy event—May's marriage to Ernest Nieriker, the 'tender friend' who has consoled her for Marmee's loss, as John consoled Nan for Beth's. He is a Swiss, handsome, cultivated, and good; an excellent family, living in Baden, and E. has a good business. May is old enough to choose for herself, and seems so happy in the new relation that we have nothing to say against it. . . . Sent her a thousand dollars as a gift, and all good wishes for the new life.

"*April*—Happy letters from May, who is enjoying life as one can but once. E. writes finely to father, and is a son to welcome, I am sure. May

sketches, and E. attends to his business by day, and both revel in music in the evening, as E. is a fine violin player.

"How different our lives are just now! I so lonely, sad, and sick; she so happy, well, and blest. She always had the cream of things, and deserved it. My time is yet to come somewhere else, when I am ready for it.

"Anna clears out the old house, for we shall never go back to it; it ceased to be 'home' when Marmee left it.

"I dawdle about, and wait to see if I am to live or die. If I live, it is for some new work. I wonder what?"

Poor Louisa! to write like that she must indeed have been "sad and lonely," and we are reminded forcibly of poor *Jo* after *Beth's* death. It is a cry from the heart, and for the first time in all her busy, useful life, we find ourselves wondering if she would not have been happier with a home, a husband, and little children of her own.

But the spring drove the cobwebs away, out-of-doors with Nature worked the cure, and real happiness in May's happiness revived her spirits. She longed to see May in her pretty home at Meudon, and planned to go there in the autumn, but gave up the idea at the last moment, as her health was too uncertain.

"Nan breaks her leg," she writes, "so it is well I stayed, as there was no one to take her place but me. Always a little chore to be done."

By the New Year (1879), she was so improved that she was able to go to Boston for a short time,

and while there got two books well started ; she was able also to mingle a little with the life about her, but in February she writes :

" Home to Concord—rather used up. Find a very quiet life is best ; for in Boston people beset me to do things [such as " Jarley's Wax Works " for a fair] and I try, and get so tired I cannot work. Dr. C. says rest is my salvation ; so I rest. Hope for Paris in the spring, as May begs me to come. She is leading what she calls ' ideal life,' painting, music, love, and the world shut out. People wonder and gossip, but May and Ernest laugh and are happy. Wise people to enjoy this lovely time ! "

She writes of a dinner given by the Papyrus Club, at the Revere House, where she was one of the guests of honour. Dr. Holmes took her in ; to her surprise she found herself the specially honoured one, sitting at the right hand of the president.

" Dr. Holmes was very gallant," she writes. " ' Little Women ' often toasted, with more praise than was good for me.

" Saw Mrs. B. at a lunch, and took her and Mrs. Dodge to Concord for a lunch. Most agreeable women.

" Pleasant times with my ' rainy-day friend,' as I call Dr. W. She is a great comfort to me, with her healthy common sense and tender patience, aside from skill as a doctor, and beauty as a woman. I love her much, and she does me good."

But the poor nerves ached during April, May, and June.

" Very poorly and cross ; so tired of being a prisoner to pain. Long for the old strength, when

I could do what I liked, and never knew I had a body. Life not worth living this way ; but having overworked the wonderful machine, I must pay for it, and should not growl, I suppose, as it is just."

In August, she took a new "Scrap-Bag" book to Boston, a collection of tales headed by "Jimmie's Cruise on the Pinafore." In September, she came home from the seaside, much refreshed, and ready for work on a new serial for *St. Nicholas*, "Jack and Jill."

"Have no plan yet," she writes, "but a boy, a girl, and a sled, with an upset to start with. Vague idea of working in Concord young folks and their doings. After two years of rest I am going to try again ; it is so easy to make money now, and so pleasant to have it to give. A chapter a day is my task, and not that, if I feel tired. No more fourteen hours a day ; make haste slowly now.

"May sent some nice little letters of an 'Artist's Holiday,' and I had them printed ; also a book for artists abroad—very useful and well done."

"*October 8th*—Dear Marmee's birthday. Never forgotten. Lovely day. Go to Sleepy Hollow with flowers. Her grave is green ; blackberry vines with red leaves trail over it. A little white stone with her initials is at the head, and among the tall grasses over her breast a little bird had made a nest ; empty now, but a pretty symbol of the refuge that tender bosom always was for all feeble and sweet things. Her favourite asters bloomed all about, and the pines sang overhead. So she and dear Beth are quietly asleep in God's acre, and we remember them more

tenderly each year that brings us nearer them and home."

"Jack and Jill" created a stir in Concord when it became known Miss Alcott was drawing the youngsters of the town. All were interested, all wanted to "go in," and all wanted to be angels. A difficult task to place them, but she enjoyed it and did the best she could.

She found that her stories were accomplishing another mission, that their simplicity and sweetness had power to touch hardened hearts, and glad always to give the best she had to those who needed it, she went to the Men's Prison in Concord with her father, where she was heartily welcomed and her stories found eager listeners, and later she drove to the Women's Prison at Sherburne, where she read a story to four hundred women, who doubtless blessed this gracious sister as she went among them, listening to their own pitiful tales.

Several years after, a young man came to see her. He was just out of the old Concord Prison, and he wanted to thank her for the little story she had told during her visit. It had put new heart into him, for his offence had been but slight—a theft committed while drunk—and after his three years' sentence he had come out eager to atone for this one fault. As usual, Miss Alcott helped him by word and deed, her heart warmed and touched by the man's earnestness.

On the 8th of November, little Miss Louisa May Nieriker came smiling into the world, and made all hearts glad. There was great rejoicing in the Alcott household, while in the little nest across the

water a strange hush brooded. Joy in the new-comer was swallowed up in anxiety for her mother. May did not improve as rapidly as they had hoped, and, in December, Louisa writes :

" May not doing well. The weight on my heart was not all imagination. She was too happy to have it last, and I fear the end is coming. Hope it is my nerves ; but this peculiar feeling has never misled me before."

And surely it did not fail her now ; the bright, joyous life went out with the old year on the 29th. The sad news reached home on the 31st.

" A dark day for us," writes Louisa. " A telegram from Ernest to Mr. Emerson tells us ' May is dead.' "

Louisa was alone when their kind friend came to break the news. Anna had gone to Boston, Mr. Alcott was at the post-office, anxiously awaiting letters which were overdue. But the philosopher had no words to ease the force of the blow.

" My child, I wish I could prepare you," he faltered, and then Louisa knew, and something in her heart seemed to break, as it had never done before.

" The dear baby may comfort Ernest," she writes, " but what can comfort us ? It is the distance that is so hard, and the thought of so much happiness ended so soon. ' Two years of perfect happiness ' May called these married years. She wished me to have her baby and her pictures. A very precious legacy. Rich payment for the little I could do for her. I see now why I lived to care for May's child, and not leave Anna all alone."

In the darkness of her sorrow, this thought comforted her. God had spared her still to be the staff of the few left behind. On January 1, 1880, she writes :

"A sad day—mourning for May. Of all the trials in my life, I never felt any so keenly as this ; perhaps because I am so feeble in health that I cannot bear it well. It seems so hard to break up that happy little home, and take May, just when life was richest, and leave me who had done my task, and could well be spared."

Ah, Louisa, your task is not done ! There's a baby coming from across the sea to brighten what is left of your life. There is a father to be cared for in his gentle, helpless old age, and a sister left on whom to lavish a rich measure of love. There are thousands of children yet to write for, and much to make life worth the living.

She felt this like the truly pious woman she was. No matter how heavy her cross, she was strong enough to bear it. She had miles to trudge before reaching her goal, so she lifted her burden once more, with the same courage as in the old childish days, when the four little sisters toiled up the hill toward the Celestial City.

CHAPTER XVII

NEW INTERESTS AND NEW FRIENDS

CONCORD truly mourned the death of May Alcott. Her many attractions had made her a great favourite, and she was a leading spirit in the town. Devoted to her art, she tried to form an art centre in Concord, placing her time and her studio at the disposal of any one whose talent turned that way. She was specially kind to Daniel Chester French, the well-known sculptor of "The Minute Man," of whose budding genius she had great hopes, and it was she who gave him his first modelling clay. She would have been a great artist had she lived, for her pictures, even the copies, tell a story of real talent.

Miss Alcott wrote to Mrs. Dodge :

"January 20, 1880.

"DEAR MRS. DODGE :

"I have been so bowed down with grief at the loss of my dear sister, just when our anxiety was over, that I have not had a thought or care for anything else.

"The story ["Jack and Jill"] is done ; but the last chapters are not copied, and I thought it best to let them lie till I could give my mind to the work.

"I never get a good chance to do a story without interruption of some sort. 'Under the Lilacs' was

finished by my mother's bedside in her last illness, and this one, when my heart was full of care and hope, and then grief over poor May.

"I trust the misery did not get into the story ; but I'm afraid it is not as gay as I meant most of it to be. . . .

"I don't believe I shall come to New York this winter. May left me her little daughter for my own ; and if she comes over soon, I shall be too busy singing lullabies to one child to write tales for others, or go anywhere, even to see my kind friends.

"A sweeter little romance has just ended in Paris than any I can ever make, and the sad facts of life leave me no heart for cheerful fiction.

"Yours truly,

"L. M. ALCOTT."

In March came a box full of mementoes of May ; her pictures, clothes, ornaments, and her sunny hair, tied with blue ribbon. It was a sad day for them, full of memories and tears ; but even sad days cannot last for ever, and Louisa's heart began to turn longingly toward her little namesake over the sea. But prudent grandmamma Nieriker suggested that the autumn would be the best time for so young a traveller to venture across the Atlantic.

This was a hope to build on, something to look forward to, and Louisa set to work at once to prepare for her baby, with all the loving forethought of a mother. Little Lulu was to be brought by her Aunt Sophie, who had promised May to see her darling safe with "Aunt Weedy," and Miss Alcott, wishing to relieve her of some of the care, sent over

a responsible woman to help her. In the meantime the threads of work were slowly picked up, and *St. Nicholas* by degrees became the chief market for her stories. Her brain, active once more, was full of new plans and ideas; many of these went into short stories, for as yet she would not bind herself to anything more.

"If I write a serial," she wrote Mrs. Dodge, "you shall have it; but I have my doubts as to the leisure and quiet, needed for such tasks, being possible with a year-old baby. Of course little Lu is a *very* remarkable child, but I fancy I shall feel as full of responsibility as a hen with one chick, and cluck and scratch industriously for the sole benefit of my daughter. She may, however, have a literary turn, and be my assistant, by offering hints and giving studies of character for my work. She comes in September, if well.

"If I do begin a new story, how would 'An Old-Fashioned Boy' and his life do? I meant that for the title of a book, but another woman took it. You proposed a Revolutionary tale once, but I was not up to it; for *this* I have quaint material in my father's journals, letters, and recollections. He was born with the century, and had an uncle in the War of 1812; and his life was very pretty and pastoral in the early days. I think a new sort of story wouldn't be amiss, with fun in it, and the queer old names and habits. I began it long ago, and if I have a chance, will finish off a few chapters and send them to you if you like.

"Yours cordially,

"L. M. ALCOTT."

! It had been a dream of Louisa's to build a long story around her father's boyhood. She always felt that his riper years had not been appreciated, and she longed to bring him before the public—as himself—not as the grandfather of "Little Women." But after all, the book was never written. New interests came crowding into her life, baby arms were soon to be flung around her neck demanding, "more towries, Aunt Wee-wee," and her thoughts went back to the stories that had pleased children in the bygone days.

In April, she was feeling so "sad and poorly" that she went to Boston for a change, which she seemed to enjoy. It was during this visit that thirty girls from Boston University called upon her. She forgot her aches, told them stories, showed them pictures, and wrote autographs.

"Pleasant to see so much innocent enthusiasm, even about so poor a thing as a used-up old woman. Bright girls! Simple in dress, sensible ideas of life, and love of education. I wish them all good luck."

May and June were full of varied interest. They were now comfortably settled in Anna's house, and were preparing the old *Orchard House* for its new tenant, Mr. W. T. Harris. Louisa was never idle when at home. She writes about a huge picnic:

"North End Mission Children at Walden Pond. Help give them a happy day—eleven hundred of them. Get Anna and John off to Walpole. Cleaned house."

The last item did not mean that she overlooked the servants, but that she "turned in" herself, with her own capable hands.

" *June 24th*—Lizzie's birthday and Johnny's. He is fifteen, a lovely, good boy, whom every one loves. Got the Dean [her father's title as head of the School of Philosophy] a new suit of clothes, as he must be nice for his duties at the school. Plato's toga was not so costly, but even he did not look better than my handsome old philosopher.

" *July and August*—To York with boys. Rest and enjoy the fine air. Home in August, and let Anna go down. Four hundred callers since the school began. . . ."

From York, she wrote to Mr. Niles about the new illustrated edition of "Little Women":

" *York, July 20, 1880*—The drawings are all capital, and we had great fun over them down here this rainy day. . . . Mr. Merrill certainly deserves a good penny for his work. Such a fertile fancy and quick hand as his should be well paid, and I shall not begrudge him his well-earned compensation, nor the praise I am sure these illustrations will earn. It is very pleasant to think that the lucky little story has been of use to a fellow-worker, and I am much obliged to him for so improving on my hasty pen-and-ink sketches. What a dear rowdy boy Teddy is, with the felt basin on. . . . Come and see how cosy we are next October, at 80 Pinckney Street. Miss N. will receive.

"Yours truly, L. M. A."

"Got things ready for my baby, warm wrapper, and all the dear can need on her long journey. On the 21st saw Mrs. Giles [who went for baby] off;

the last time I went it was to see May go. She was sober and sad, not gay as before ; seemed to feel it might be a longer voyage than we knew. The last view I had of her was standing alone, in the long blue cloak, waving her hand to us, smiling with wet eyes till out of sight. How little we dreamed what an experience of love, joy, pain, and death she was going to !

“ *September*—Put papers in order, and arrange things generally, to be in order when our Lulu comes. Make a cosy nursery for the darling, and say my prayers over the little white crib that waits for her.”

On the 18th, Miss Alcott went to Boston to meet the steamer, due on the 19th. She waited on the wharf with a full heart, watching for her baby, and wondering if she could pick her out from among the many she saw coming off the ship. At last the captain appeared, holding in his arms a tiny yellow-haired creature, all in white, who looked about her with lively blue eyes, and chattered in her baby way. Mrs. Giles walked beside her, and close behind came Aunt Sophie, “ A lovely, brown-eyed girl.”

The meeting is best described in Miss Alcott’s own words :

“ I held out my arms to Lulu, only being able to say her name. She looked at me for a moment, then came to me, saying ‘ Marmar ’ in a wistful way, resting close, as if she had found her own people and home at last—as she had, thank Heaven ! I could only listen while I held her, and the others told their tale. Then we got home as soon as we

could, and dear baby behaved very well, though hungry and tired.

"The little princess was received with tears and smiles, and being washed and fed, went quietly to sleep in her new bed, while we brooded over her, and were never tired of looking at the little face of 'May's baby.' "

Little Lulu quickly found her place in the hearts of the family. She was not beautiful at first, but she blossomed out wonderfully when the sea tan left her face, and the yellow hair looked less like the down of a chicken. "A happy thing, laughing and waving her hands, confiding and bold, with a keen look in the eyes so like May, who hated shams, and saw through them at once. She always comes to me, and seems to have decided that I am really 'Marmar.' My heart is full of pride and joy, and the touch of the dear little hands seems to take away the bitterness of grief. I often go at night to see if she is really *here*, and the sight of the little head is like sunshine to me. Father adores her, and she loves to sit in his strong arms. They make a pretty picture, as he walks in the garden with her to 'see birdies.' Anna tends her as she did May, who was her baby once, being ten years younger, and we all find life easier to live, now the baby has come."

The young sister-in-law proved most attractive, and as Concord was dull for a girl who had been used to much gaiety, Louisa decided to take a house in town for the winter, where she and the boys could have a pleasant time.

Her mind was free to enjoy her baby and her new

Letter from LOUISA ALCOTT to EDWARD MARSTON (1880)

York Harbor July 15th

Dear Mr Marston.

I have heard nothing
from Baron B. about "Jack
& Jill", but if he wants
it we can arrange as he-
fore, since there seems to
be no law about it.

The Frenchman has no
right to meddle with my
stories, but as I cannot
prevent him I suppose

I must submit, accept
the sum offered, & amuse
myself by laughing
over his dull attempts
to Frenchify a very
American story.

I should have answered
sooner but - was
at the seaside & your
letter went astray on
its way to me.

Yrs truly

L. H. Hall.

friend, for "Jack and Jill" supplied the needs of her exacting young readers for a time at least.

Only a simple tale, of simple country life, sweet and wholesome as a sound apple. Her dedication—

" TO THE SCHOOLMATES

of

ELLSWORTH DEVENS,

whose lovely character will not soon be forgotten,"

tells something of the story, for *Ed Devlin* is surely none other than the lamented comrade of the Concord boys and girls. In *Mrs. Minot* we have her sister Anna, for Minot was a name that took root in the Pratt family, and the two boys, *Frank* and *Jack*, were most certainly her nephews, Fred and John.

All their favourite nooks and out-of-the-way corners she described most vividly.

To those familiar with Concord and its neighbourhood, the story no doubt holds added interest. *Merry* and *Molly* and *Jill* are such *real* girls, that we should like to know their living models, while *Baby Boo* was too lively for a "make-believe" boy. Harmony Village of course meant Concord, and the tranquil river, with its wooded shores and distant hills, its cool, rippling breezes and its beautiful sunsets, has ever been a favourite playground for the young ones of the village.

The tale grows grave in parts, owing to the author's heavy heart, but in the chapter called "A Sweet Memory," a tribute to the memory of her favourite Ellsworth Devens, we gather something of the simple beauty of Miss Alcott's own creed ; for

this may be said of her, as it can be said of few, she practised as she preached, and the same peacefulness which stole into the children's hearts after the burial of their friend was her own, as she dried her eyes and "remembered her mercies."

The baby made her young, the tired brain found rest in planning infant tales ; new plays had to be invented, new romps instituted ; of course she turned for help to the boys, and the new life stirred her blood.

Lulu's first birthday was a trying time, remembering what her coming had cost them, but the birthday ceremonies were all kept. There was a cake with one candle, a crown for the queen, a silver mug, picture books, toys, flowers, and plenty of sunshine for Baby Lu.

The next years passed uneventfully ; playing mother was great fun, and in bringing up the little girl, Louisa used many of the methods which had proved so successful with herself and her sisters. Her old cheerfulness gradually came back to her, and though her days revolved about her child, they were happy days. In a letter to a friend she writes of Lulu : " I wish you could see the pretty creature, who already shows many of her mother's traits and tastes. Her love of pictures is a passion, but she will not look at the gay ones most babies enjoy. She chooses the delicate, well-drawn, and painted figures of Caldecott and Miss Greenaway. Over these she broods with rapture, pointing her little fingers at the cows or cats, and kissing the children, with funny prattling to these dumb playmates. She is a fine, tall girl, full of energy, intelligence, and health ; blonde and blue-eyed like her mother,

but with her father's features, for which I am glad, for he is a handsome man. Louisa May bids fair to be a noble woman, and I hope I may live to see May's child as brave, and bright, and talented as she was, and much happier in her fate."

On Lulu's second birthday, she had *two* kisses, a cake with two candles, a new chair and a doll's carriage, toys, pictures, and flowers. She was escorted downstairs in state, and petted and purred over all day. She was a sweet, generous child, with strong affections. On one occasion a poor woman from Illinois wrote Miss Alcott, begging her to send some Christmas gifts to her children, as she could not afford to buy any. They had asked her to write to Santa Claus, and so she applied to Miss Alcott, who sent a box, and wrote a story about it; little Lulu was much interested and wanted to give everything she had to "poor little boys."

Quite early the young lady learned where flowed the story-telling fountain, and "Aunt Wee-wee" was taxed sometimes a dozen a day. Anything about lambs, piggies, and "tats" was immensely enjoyed, and certainly the big aunt and the little niece had many interesting times together.

In April, 1882, Mr. Emerson was ill, and Mr. Alcott went to see him. Emerson had been the sunshine of his life for many years, he had believed in him when others had only laughed; he had helped him in his need, in a hundred gentle, quiet ways, and had been to them all the kindest and truest of friends. Now the useful life was coming to an end, and there was deep sorrow in Concord. On April 27th, Louisa writes in her journal:

"Mr. Emerson died at 9 P.M. suddenly. Our best and greatest American gone. The nearest and dearest friend father ever had, and the man who has helped me most, by his life, his books, his society. I can never tell all he has been to me, from the time I sang Mignon's song under his window (a little girl)—and wrote letters, *à la* Bettine, to him, my Goethe, at fifteen, up through my hard years when his essays on Self-Reliance, Character, Compensation, Love, and Friendship helped me to understand myself, and Life, and God, and Nature. Illustrious and beloved friend, good-bye !

"*Sunday, 30th*—Emerson's funeral. I made a yellow lyre of jonquils for the church, and helped trim it up. Private services at the house, and a great crowd at the church. Father read his sonnet, and Judge Hoar and others spoke. Now he lies in Sleepy Hollow—among his brothers, under the pines he loved."

Louisa sat up till midnight writing an article on Emerson, for *The Youth's Companion*, that the children might know something of him, and the power he was in the world.

From time to time she has put her memory of him into articles for different periodicals. There was no halfway admiration for this great thinker ; he had been her idol from the time she first grasped what greatness really was, until the brilliant light went out for ever. Naturally she used his name and example in making Concord a temperance town, for in May, twenty-seven boys signed the pledge. The reform was much needed there, and Louisa worked for the cause with all her old energy.

In June, she paid a sad little visit to Alice Bartlett, their companion on the trip abroad. "A queer time," she writes, "driving about, or talking over our year in Europe. School children called upon me, with flowers, and so forth.

"*June 24th*—John's seventeenth birthday. A dear boy, good and gay, full of love, manliness, and all honest and lovely traits, like his father and mother. Long life to my boy ! "

In July, the School of Philosophy opened in full force. "The first year," writes Miss Alcott, "Concord people stood aloof, and the strangers found it hard to get rooms. Now every one is eager to take them, and the school is pronounced a success, because it brings money to the town. Even philosophers can't do without food, beds, and washing, so all rejoice, and the new craze flourishes. If all our guests paid we should be well off ; several hundred a month is rather wearing. Father asked why we never went, and Anna showed him a long list of four hundred names of callers, and he said no more."

In October, she went to Boston with John, for a short stay, leaving Lulu at home ; she needed the quiet, though she missed her baby. She took rooms at the Bellevue, her haven of rest, and she began to think of stories once more. Mrs. Dodge wanted a serial, and "Jo's Boys" suggested itself to her mind. She had scarcely made a good beginning, however, when a telegram called her home. Mr. Alcott had a paralytic stroke, which left him dumb and helpless. The change in the life of the active old man was very pathetic, and his family became anxious about him. His daughter writes :

"The forty sonnets of last winter, and the fifty lectures at the school last summer, were too much for a man of eighty-three. He was warned by Dr. W., but thought it folly to stop; and now poor Father pays the penalty of breaking the laws of health. I have done the same; may I be spared this end!"

It was a strange thing about Louisa and her work; given a quiet, even stretch, with no care nor worry, her fancy flowed tranquilly, and the results were not noticed; but a serious illness always acted as a mental spur. It was her time for story-telling, for, as we well know, her best tales were written under high pressure. Her father's slow improvement gave her an opportunity to slip away to Boston once in a while, and on one of these trips she began a book called "Genius."

"Shall never finish it, I dare say, but must keep a vent for my fancies to escape at. This double life is trying, and my head will work as well as my hands."

She took Lulu to Boston for a month, to the little girl's delight, for Boston was a new world to her, and she enjoyed the walks and the petting she got from everyone.

On April 6th, she went home to stay; her father needed her, and the housekeeping was too heavy a burden for Anna alone. She wrote a story for *St. Nicholas* at odd moments, and during that summer took care of Lulu, for a competent nurse was hard to find, "so my poor baby has a bad time, with her little temper and active mind and body. Could do it myself if I had the nerves and strength, but am

needed elsewhere, and must leave the child to some one. Long to go away with her and do as I like. Shall never lead my own life."

"*July*—Go to Nonquitt with Miss H. and Lulu for the summer. A quiet, healthy place, with pleasant people and fine air. Turn Lulu loose, with H. to run after her, and try to rest.

"Lulu takes her first bath in the sea—very bad; walks off toward Europe up to her neck, and is much afflicted that I won't let her go to the bottom and see the 'little trabs'; makes a cupid of herself and is very pretty and gay. The boys revel in the simple pleasures of Nonquitt—a fine place for them to be in."

Hereafter Nonquitt was to them all a haven of delight. Louisa was persuaded to buy a home there, and as the place was swarming with young people, she was in her element, and never happier than when among them. The days were spent on the beach, watching the bathers and sunning herself in the sands. The evenings were gay with charades and private theatricals. The two boys had the family talent, Fred in particular being an excellent comedian, and though Louisa's acting was a thing of the past, on account of the exertion, Anna occasionally took old women's parts, and the youngsters came in for a fine drilling. And here her eldest nephew had his first sip of a real romance, which blossomed later into true love and a happy marriage. Miss Alcott writes to her friend, Mrs. Williams, of Nonquitt and its charms:

"... My poppet is a picture of health, vigour, and delightful naughtiness. She runs wild in this

fine place, with some twenty other children to play with, nice babies, well bred, with pleasant mammas for me to gossip with.

"It would be a pleasant place for your little people, as the air is delicious, bathing safe and warm, and cottages to be quiet in, if one cares to keep house. Do try it next year. Let me know early. I can get a nice little cot for you (near mine) for one hundred dollars or perhaps less, from June to October, if you care to stay.

"We have been here since July, and are all hearty, brown, and gay as larks. Lulu has some trifling ailment now and then—just enough to show me how dear she is to us all, and what a great void the loss of our little girl would make in hearts and home. She is very intelligent and droll. When I told her the other day that the crickets were hopping and singing in the grass with their mammas, she said at once: 'No, their Aunt Weedys.' Auntie is nearer than Mother to the poor baby and it is very sweet to have it so, since it must be."

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"The older birthdays are 29th of November, Lulu's the 8th; so we celebrate for Grandpa, Auntie, and Lulu all at once, in great style—eighty-three, fifty, and three years old.

"When I get on my pins, I am going to devote myself to settling poor souls who need a gentle boost in hard times."

The history of the next few years is pleasant and tranquil. Mr. Alcott slowly rallied from his first attack, and Louisa spent her time between Concord

and Boston, sometimes feeling like her old self, sometimes so weary and nervous that it took all her courage to get along. John and Lulu were her stand-bys at such times ; the boy so tender and strong to lean upon, the little girl so sweet and winning. Miss Alcott did not believe in hard measures with children, but in January, 1884, she writes : " New Year Day is made memorable by my solemnly spanking my child. Miss C. [her governess] and others assure me it is the only way to cure her wilfulness. I doubt it ; but knowing that mothers are usually too tender and blind, I correct my dear in the old-fashioned way. She proudly says, ' Do it, do it,' and when it is done, is heart-broken at the idea of Aunt Wee-Wee's giving her pain. Her bewilderment is pathetic, and the effect, as I expected, a failure. Love is better, but also endless patience."

The history of her work is very fitful. " Jo's Boys " was still in progress, as it was destined to be for some years, for the tired, overworked brain could not bear much. She busied herself with short stories for *St. Nicholas*, and collecting the many she had on hand into book form. The best known of these story-books compiled at that time are " Spinning-Wheel Stories " and " Proverb Stories." " Lulu's Library " came later, and a " Garland for Girls " the last of all. Concerning the " Spinning-Wheel Stories," she wrote to Mrs. Dodge :

" I like the idea of ' Spinning-Wheel Stories,' and can do several for a series, which can come out in a book later. Old-time tales, with a thread

running through all, from the wheel that enters in the first one.

"A Christmas party of children might be at an old farmhouse, and hunt up the wheel, and grandma spins and tells the first story ; and being snow-bound, others amuse the young folks each evening with more tales. . . .

"Being at home and quiet for a week or so, . . . I have begun the serial, and done two chapters ; but the Spinning tales come tumbling into my mind so fast, I'd better pin a few while 'genius burns.' Perhaps you would like to start the set at Christmas. The picture being ready, the first story can be done in a week. 'Sophie's Secret' can come later.

"The serial was to be 'Mrs. Gay's Summer School,' and have some city girls and boys go to an old farmhouse, and, for fun, dress and live as in old times, and learn the good, thrifty, old ways, with adventures and fun thrown in. That might come in the spring, as it takes me longer to grind yarns now than of old.

"Glad you are better. Thanks for the kind wishes for the little house ; come and see it, and gladden the eyes of forty young admirers by a sight of M.M.D. next year."

In another letter, headed 31, Chestnut Street, December 31st, she writes : "A little cousin, thirteen years old, has written a story and longs to see it in print. It is a well-written bit, and pretty good for a beginner, so I send it to you, hoping it may find a place in the children's corner. She is a grand-child of S. J. May, and a bright lass, who paints

nicely, and is a domestic little person in spite of her budding accomplishments. Good luck to her.

"I hoped to have a Christmas story for some one, but am forbidden to write for six months, after a bad turn of vertigo. So I give it up and take warning. All good wishes for the New Year.

"From yours affectionately,

"L. M. ALCOTT."

After this Miss Alcott was more or less under the doctor's orders. In another letter to Mrs. Dodge, she says :

"I cannot promise anything, but hope to be allowed to write a little, as my doctor has decided that it is as well to let me put on paper the tales 'knocking at the saucepan lid and demanding to be taken out' (like *Mrs. Crachit's* potatoes) as to have them go on worrying me inside. So I'm scribbling at 'Jo's Boys'—long promised to Mr. Niles, and clamoured for by the children. I may write but one hour a day, so cannot get on very fast; but if it is ever done, I can think of a serial for *St. Nicholas*, and can easily start it for '88, if head and hand allow. I will simmer on it this summer, and see if it can be done. Hope so, for I don't want to give up work so soon."

Poor Louisa! in harness to the last! Her work had become as dear to her heart as if it were her own flesh and blood; to give it up, would be like yielding a part of her life. She was not an old woman; with health she would have been in her

prime, with a brain as strong and energetic and far better stored than in the old days of "pot-boilers" and scanty pay. But the engine panted even on the level grade, and the reckless engineer had to slacken speed, and yield the throttle into other hands.

CHAPTER XVIII

A LOVING MEMORY

THE next few years were records of waning strength, care for her father, delight in the little girl, clinging to the one sister left her, and joy and pride in "the boys." They were young men now, and a great comfort. John she decided to adopt. She knew that, with herself and her father, the Alcott name would die out, and in making John her legal "son and heir" it was with the stipulation that he should take the name of Alcott.

After years of struggle with ill-health, "Jo's Boys," her last promise to the eager public, saw the light. In reading the book, so full of memories, we truly begin to realize that nearly twenty years had passed since the publication of "Little Women," and that the young people who pored over those fascinating pages were now grave men and women, bending their heads in absorbed interest over "Jo's Boys."

Her preface is pathetic when we look back on the pages of her life :

"Having been written at long intervals during the past seven years, this story is more faulty than its predecessors, but the desire to atone for an unavoidable disappointment, and to please my patient little friends, has urged me to let it go without delay.

“ To account for the seeming neglect of *Amy*, let me add, that since the original of the character died, it has been impossible for me to write of her, as when she was here to suggest, criticise, and laugh over her namesake. The same excuse applies to *Marmee*. But the folded leaves are not blank to those who knew and loved them, and can find memorials of them in whatever is cheerful, true, or helpful in these pages.”

The story was completed at her sister's home in Concord. The old house had grown into a most attractive dwelling, its yellow tint standing out clear cut amid the evergreens surrounding it. Miss Alcott had improved it from time to time, until Thoreau himself would scarcely have recognized its interior.

Mr. Alcott's library, which had been one of the additions, was built at the back of the drawing-room, and was a most delightful place, with its low ceilings, well-lined bookshelves, and interesting mementoes of the family. Just above the library was Louisa's special sanctum, a large sunny room overlooking the beloved river, with its background of hills. Each window framed a beautiful picture, and safe in this retreat, the literary spider could spin her web undisturbed, and here “*Jo's Boys*” rounded itself out to the desired end. She winds up the story in this fashion :

“ And now having endeavoured to suit every one by many weddings, few deaths, and as much prosperity as the eternal fitness of things will permit, let the music stop, the lights die out, and the curtain fall for ever on the *March* family.”

This was sadly prophetic ; with the completion of " Jo's Boys," her real work ended. There were short stories now and then, " A Garland for Girls " being written as a pastime while under the doctor's care. In the writing of " Jo's Boys," the usual " vortex " threatened, but an attack of vertigo frightened her into a week's illness, with sleepless nights. " Head worked like a steam engine," she writes, " would not stop. Planned ' Jo's Boys ' to the end, and longed to get up and write it. Told Dr. W. that he had better let me get the idea *out*, then I could rest. He very wisely agreed, and said : ' As soon as you can, write half an hour a day and see if it does you good. Rebellious brains want to be attended to, or trouble comes.' So I began as soon as able, and was satisfied we were right, for my head felt better very soon, and with much care about not overdoing, I had some pleasant hours when I forgot my body and lived in my mind.

After that, she wrote one or two hours a day and felt no ill effects. During the winter of 1886, Miss Alcott took a furnished house in Boston. It was delightfully situated in Louisburg Square, and all were pleased with the arrangement. Anna could be near her boys, who were in business, Louisa could have her child and work as well, and poor, feeble Mr. Alcott would enjoy the change.

Whenever there was a move—and the Alcott family could never stay on and on in the same place—the rummaging spirit came upon Louisa. This time it took the form of sorting and burning letters too private for the gossip lovers to print. This was not good for her ; for days she lived over her past—

they were only simple annals, to be sure, a mingling of dead rose leaves with the scent of lavender—but these old memories stayed her hand, and she began to think that it might be well to keep some record of her life, that others might read and profit by her experience. It was this kindly thought for the coming generations that gave to the lovers of her books a closer view of the author. So we see her first impulse was to destroy all record of herself; but, living for others as she had done all her life, she paused in time.

The portraits in “*Jo’s Boys*” are very lifelike. *Jo* has grown older, but like Louisa herself, never too old to be a girl at heart; *Meg* mellowed with the years into a sweet and tender matron; the boys and girls had all grown up, fulfilling their separate destinies in their own way, and her pet black sheep, the untamable *Dan*, worked his own salvation in the end.

Even the School of Philosophy had its portrait painted in a flattering way, for it rose as a college on the hilltop, and *Mr. Bhaer*, as president, and *Mr. March*, as chaplain, lived to see their long-cherished dream beautifully realized. Perhaps the picture of *Nan* is the most vivid, for that restless young person had many of Louisa’s own traits, and certainly the free and independent life *Nan* led would have been her own portion, had she been able to choose. But we miss *Marmee*, and the shadowy outlines of *Mrs. Amy* make her figure seem unreal. For the rest, our “little men” grown up are most satisfactory, and, needless to say, the fifty thousand of the first edition sold fast. In spite of this, her own

opinion of "Jo's Boys" was not favourable. Her best work was always done at top speed. In her days of comparative health such a task could have been accomplished in a month at most, but creeping along as she did, with long intervals between the parts, made, to her own thinking, a most unsatisfactory result. The only illustration in the book is the bas-relief of her own head, taken from the sculptured piece by Walter Ricketson, a young artist, to whom she had been much help. She says in a letter to Mr. Niles :

"Sorry you don't like the bas-relief; I do. A portrait, if bright and comely, wouldn't be me, and if like me, would disappoint the children; so we had better let them imagine 'Aunt Jo young and beautiful, with her hair in two tails down her back'; as the little girl said." The little girl she refers to was a young Southerner, who visited Boston soon after the publication of "Little Women." She was taken to Concord on a special pilgrimage to see the author, and breathlessly waited for her idol. When she saw her she burst into tears of disappointment, and would not be comforted.

Her mind now hovered between a novel for Mr. Niles and a serial for Mrs. Dodge. "I have a dozen plots in my head," she says, "but think the serial had better come first. I want a great deal of money for many things, and expenses increase. I am the only money-maker, and must turn the mill for others, though my own grist is ground and in the barn."

Housekeeping in town, anxiety about her father, the coming and going of so many people, her own

unsatisfactory work, told on the worn-out nerves. In the summer she was back in Concord, near her father, while the others went to the seashore. In September, they were again in the Boston house, but in December, Louisa broke down completely, and it was then she put herself under the care of Dr. Rhoda Lawrence, and became an inmate of her home at Dunreath Place, Roxbury, where, with few intervals, she remained during the rest of her life.

She was beginning to see the disastrous effects of overwork. She had reached the stage when even the companionship of her family wore upon her nerves. It grieved her to be away from her home and all she loved ; her father was failing fast and she longed to be to him the loving nurse she had been to the others in their need ; but the tired nerves could not bear the strain, rest was the only hope for her, and perfect quiet could be had at Dunreath Place.

From that time Dr. Lawrence became friend and nurse, as well as physician, accompanying her patient wherever she went. In the summer of 1887, she visited her father in Melrose ; from there she went home to Concord to look over some papers, and complete the plan for adopting her nephew, and finished the season at Princeton (Mass.), which she enjoyed with all her old-time pleasure. But a sudden attack of rheumatism and vertigo undid all the good, and she returned to Roxbury in a very nervous state, the old aches and pains of bygone years springing up again like menacing ghosts.

Louisa was too sensible a woman not to know how close she was creeping to the very margin of life ; yet she planned out stories for years ahead,

and sewed industriously for the poor, when not weaving "pot-boilers" from force of habit. It was during this seclusion that she wrote "A Garland for Girls," a group of short stories suggested by the beautiful flowers constantly sent her. She amused herself in many ways, but saw no company. She enjoyed writing and answering letters, and many a youthful ambition was warmed and nourished by her kindly words of advice; from the young man who asked her if she would advise him to devote himself to authorship—as if she could decide such a question—to the little chap who sent twenty-five cents to buy her books. She returned the money, explaining that it was not enough, but sent him "Little Men" as a present.

She was delighted over the engagement of her nephew Fred. In a letter to her aunt, Mrs. Bond, March 15, 1887, she says :

"I have been hoping to get out and see you all winter, but have been so ill I could only live on hope, as a relish to my gruel, that being my only food, and not of a nature to give me strength. The spring days will set me up, I trust, and my first pilgrimage shall be to you; for I want you to see how prettily my May-flower [her pet name for May's child] is blossoming into a fine offshoot of the old plant.

"Lizzie Wells has probably told you of our news of Fred and his little bride, and Anna has written to you about it, as only a proud mamma can.

". . . I was sorry to hear that you were poorly again. Isn't it hard to sit serenely in one's soul

when one's body is in a dilapidated state? I feel it a great bore, but try to do it patiently, and hope to see the why by and by, when this mysterious life is made clear to me. I had a lovely dream about that and want to tell it to you some day. Love to all.

“ Ever yours,

“ L. M. A.”

Mrs. Bond had her own corner in the affections of the entire family. It was through her kindness that May was able to take the first steps in her work, and all through their trials and struggles she had been a staunch and faithful friend. “ Marmee's ” death had brought her specially close to Louisa, who loved to write to her during those quiet days.

Even as late as the spring and summer of 1887, Louisa was planning new work for the coming year. “ A Modern Mephistopheles ” was republished under her own name, with one of her old stories, “ A Whisper in the Dark,” to round out the volume ; to this she wrote the following explanatory preface :

“ ‘ A Modern Mephistopheles ’ was written among the earlier volumes of the *No Name Series*, when the chief idea of the authors was to puzzle their readers as much as possible, that they might enjoy the guessing and criticism as each novel appeared. This book was very successful in preserving its incognito, and many persons still insist that it could not have been written by the author of ‘ Little Women.’ As I much enjoyed trying to

embody a shadow of my favourite poem in the story, as well as the amusement it has afforded those in the secret for some years, it is considered well to add this volume to the few romances which are offered, not as finished work by any means, but merely attempts at something graver than magazine stories or juvenile literature.

“ L. M. ALCOTT.”

The romances to which she refers are “ Work,” “ Moods,” and “ A Modern Mephistopheles,” which Roberts Brothers were bringing out in uniform volumes. Another story was simmering, “ A Tragedy of To-day.” “ I hope,” she writes Mr. Niles, “ to do ‘ A Tragedy of To-day,’ this summer, and it can come out in the fall or next spring. . . . A spunky new one would make the old ones go.”

In another letter to Mrs. Bond, she writes : “ As you and I belong to the ‘ Shut-in Society,’ we may now and then cheer each other by a line. Your note and verse are very good to me to-day, as I sit trying to feel all right, in spite of the stiffness that won’t walk, the rebel stomach that won’t work, and the tired head that won’t rest.

“ My verse lately has been from a little poem found under a good soldier’s pillow in the hospital :

“ ‘ I am no longer eager, bold and strong,
All that is past ;
I am ready not to do—
At last—at last—
My half-day’s work is done,
And this is all my part—
I give a patient God
My patient heart.’ ”

"The learning not to do is so hard after being the hub to the family wheel so long. But it is good for the energetic ones to find that the world can get on without them, and learn to be still, to give up, and wait cheerfully.

"As we have 'fell into poetry,' as *Silas Wegg* says, I add a bit of my own; for since you are Marmee now, I feel that you won't laugh at my poor attempts any more than she did, even when I burst forth at the ripe age of eight."

Perhaps the following lines were what she sent; at any rate, though written a year earlier, they seem most appropriate here, showing, as they do, every side of her rich nature:

MY PRAYER.

Courage and patience, these I ask,
Dear Lord, in this—my latest strait;
For hard I find my ten years' task,
Learning to suffer and to wait.

Life seems so rich and grand a thing,
So full of work for heart and brain,
It is a cross that I can bring,
No help, no offering, but pain.

The hard-earned harvest of these years,
I long to generously share;
The lessons learned with bitter tears,
To teach again with tender care.

To smooth the rough and thorny way,
Where other feet begin to tread;
To feed some hungry soul each day,
With sympathy's sustaining bread.

So beautiful such pleasures show,
I long to make them mine;
To love and labour, and to know
The joy such living makes divine.

But if I may not, I will only ask
Courage and patience for my fate,
And learn, dear Lord, thy latest task,
To suffer patiently and wait.

To Mrs. Bond she sent the first author's copy of "Lulu's Library." She had always done this to her mother, and she felt that this well-loved aunt was a fitting representative of "Marmee." The book was made up of many of the old "Flower Fables," told long ago to her sister May and her playmates, and retold to Lulu, with many fresh touches.

Her last birthday was a happy one, though still in seclusion. Letters, gifts, and flowers came crowding upon her, and she was feeling so much better that every one began to hope for her recovery. After Christmas, there were busy preparations for Fred's wedding, in which Louisa took a deep interest, though she sat apart in her sanctuary. Her father began at this time to fail rapidly, and she wrote to Mrs. Bond on February 7, 1888 :

"DEAR AUNTIE :

"My blessed Anna is so busy [Fred was to be married next day] and I can do so little to help her, I feel as if I might take upon me the pleasant duty of writing to you.

"Father is better, and we are all so grateful, for just now we want all to be bright for our boy.

"The end is not far off, but Father rallies wonderfully from each feeble spell, and keeps serene and happy through everything. I don't ask to keep him, now that life is a burden, and am glad to

have him go before it becomes a pain. We shall miss the dear old white head, and the feeble saint, so long our care ; but as Anna says, ' He will be with Mother.' So we shall be happy in the hope of that meeting.

" Sunday he seemed very low, and I was allowed to drive in and say ' good-bye.' He knew me and smiled, and kissed ' Weedy,' as he calls me, and I thought the drowsiness and difficulty of breathing could not last long. But he revived, got up, and seemed so much as usual, I may be able to see him again. It is a great grief that I am not there as I was with Lizzie and Mother, but though much better, the shattered nerves won't bear much yet, and quiet is my only cure.

" I sit alone, and bless the little pair, like a fond old grandmother. You show me how to do it. With love to all,

" Yours ever,
L^y."

Her last note to Mrs. Bond was :

" February 8, 1888.

" Air, ' *Haste to the Wedding !* '

" DEAR AUNTIE :

" I little knew what a sweet surprise was in store for me when I wrote you yesterday.

" As I worked this morning my good Dr. Lawrence came in with the lovely azalea, her round face beaming through the leaves like a full moon.

" It is very dear of you to remember me and cheer up my lonely day with such a beautiful guest.

" It stands beside me on Marmee's work-table, and reminds me tenderly of her favourite flowers. Among those used at her funeral was a spray of this, which lasted for two weeks afterwards, opening bud by bud in the glass on her table, where lay the dear old ' Jos May ' hymn book and her diary, with the pen shut in, just as she left it when she last wrote there, three days before the end. ' The twilight is closing about me, and I am going to rest in the arms of my children.'

" So you see I love the delicate flower and enjoy it very much.

" I can write now, and soon hope to come out and see you for a few minutes, as I drive out every fine day, and go and kiss my people once a week, for fifteen minutes.

" Slow climbing, but I don't slip back ; so think up my mercies, and sing cheerfully, as dear Marmee used to do.

" ' Thus far the Lord has led me on ! '

" Your loving
" Lu."

Thus, with courage, patience, and beautiful faith, Louisa Alcott climbed higher and higher toward the Celestial City which from childhood she had seen afar. " The Pilgrim's Progress " had been her guiding star through life, as it had been her father's and her mother's before her, as it was, indeed, to the staunch Puritan from generation to generation.

In the beautiful lines to her father on his eighty-sixth birthday, especially in the first and last

stanzas, she shows how the wonderful allegory rounded out the measure of his years :

Dear Pilgrim, waiting patiently,
The long, long journey nearly done,
Beside the sacred stream that flows
Clear shining in the western sun ;
Look backward on the varied road
Your steadfast feet have trod,
From youth to age, through weal and woe,
Climbing forever nearer God.

The staff set by, the sandals off,
Still pondering the precious scroll,
Serene and strong he waits the call
That frees and wings a happy soul.
There, beautiful as when it lured
The boy's aspiring eyes,
Before the Pilgrim's longing sight,
Shall the Celestial City rise.

Louisa was never afraid of death. To those she had loved, it had brought peace, and though the love of living was strong within her, she was content, as she said, to " wait patiently " God's will.

Early in March, her father grew alarmingly worse. With aching heart, Louisa drove in to see him for the last time, and the last letter she ever wrote was penned just afterwards to her friend, Mrs. Porter, who had sent her a pretty picture of May. The little note reads as follows :

" DEAR MRS. PORTER :

" Thanks for the picture. I am glad to have it. No philosophy is needed for the impending event. I shall be very glad when the dear old man falls asleep after his long and innocent life. Sorrow

has no place at such times, and death is never terrible when it comes in the likeness of a friend.

“ Yours truly,

“ L. M. ALCOTT.

“ P.S.—I have another year to stay in my ‘ Saint’s Rest,’ and then I am promised twenty years of health. I don’t want so many, and I have no idea I shall see them. But as I don’t live for myself, I hold on for others, and shall find time to die some day, I hope.”

She had been lured by the mild weather to make some change in her dress, and absorbed in her own sad thoughts over the pain of parting, she forgot the fur wrap she usually wore. So like she was to a fragile hot-house plant, that the faintest whiff of air to which she was not accustomed was apt to prove disastrous.

The next day she was stricken down ; merciful unconsciousness came to her like an angel of peace and rest, and on March 6, 1888, Louisa Alcott closed her weary eyes and “ went out with the tide ” to meet the father who had gone two days before.

Over twenty years have passed since the dark hour when the children heard—“ Louisa Alcott is dead,” and thousands can recall the sorrow that filled their hearts, and the tears that dimmed their eyes.

There are those who remember the simple funeral in her father’s rooms, the touching words read over

her, and the quiet burial at Concord in the cemetery of Sleepy Hollow, at the feet of those she loved the best, in the gracious company of the men and women who had been closest to her in her life.

"Her boys" went beside her as a guard of honour, and the girls hid their bright eyes, and wept for the dear, dead friend.

But she was not dead ; Louisa Alcott's presence was too radiant to pass without leaving a stream of light behind. She lives in her books, in the hearts of her readers, in the untold deeds of love and kindness, which were locked up in the great, generous soul.

She was so modest that few people, outside of her own circle of friends, knew what charm of mind and person she possessed. She was tall, and in later years somewhat stately, with finely chiselled, rather massive features, and a wealth of chestnut hair, which waved over the fine forehead ; her complexion was brilliant, and her eyes were " gloriously blue." As to expression, this beautiful sonnet by Margaret Ashman, an ardent admirer, will best express what a thoughtful person read in the face of Louisa Alcott.

ON A PORTRAIT OF MISS ALCOTT.

In all my fancies, when I was a child,
I pictured her a princess, stately made—
Fair-featured, rich, a new Sheherazade,
On whom a kindly fate forever smiled.
The blithesome story-teller, that beguiled
The soul of childhood. Could her beauty fade,
Her genius wane, her ready pen be stayed
By grief or age ? 'Twere heresy most wild

To think these things. Now, where I musing stand,
Her portrait hangs. This unassuming guise
Show, not a princess, haughty to command,
But one most humble, human, sorrow-wise,
Who seems to live and reach me forth her hand,
A woman, simple, sweet, with tired eyes.

A woman! That is what she strove to be, a strong, self-reliant, practical woman, showing her more timid sisters the way to freedom, through high endeavours and noble purpose, never swerving from the path of duty through all the trials of her life. Her father wrote of her :

When I remember with what buoyant heart,
Midst war's alarms and woes of civil strife,
In youthful eagerness, thou didst depart,
At peril of thy safety, peace, and life,
To nurse the wounded soldier, swathe the dead,
How pierced soon by fever's poisoned dart,
And brought, unconscious, home with 'wildered head,
Thou ever since 'mid languor and dull pain,
To conquer fortune, cherish kindred dear,
Hast with grave studies vexed a sprightly brain,
In myriad households kindled love and cheer,
Ne'er from thyself by Fame's loud trump beguiled,
Sounding in this and the farther hemisphere—
I press thee to my heart, as Duty's faithful child.

They are all sleeping now, under the pines they loved so well—all but May—though the simple stone marks her vacant corner. Mother, Father, Anna, Beth, with the baby brother, dead so long ago, and at their feet, guarding them, Louisa, that she might "take care" of them as she had done all her life.

Little Lulu went back to her father and the years have touched her into charming womanhood. The

"boys" live on in Concord and Boston, with homes and families of their own, keeping green the memory of the woman who gave them all she had, her love, her fortune, and the undimmed lustre of her name.

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